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MISS DAISY DIMITY

BY

THE AUTHOR OF

“QUEENIE,”

“ORANGE LILY,” “A JEWEL OF A GIRL,”

“MY LOVE, SHE’S BUT A LASSIE,”

&c., &c.

IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOL. III.

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“ I see thee glittering from afar—
And then thou art a pretty star,
Not quite so fair as many are
 In heaven above thee !
Yet like a star, with glittering crest,
Self-poised in air thou seem’st to rest ;—
May peace come never to his nest
 Who shall reprove thee !

Sweet Flower ! for by that name at last,
When all my reveries are past,
I call thee, and to that cleave fast,
 Sweet silent Creature !
Do thou, as thou art wont, repair
My heart with gladness, and a share
 Of thy meek nature !”

To the Daisy—WORDSWORTH.

MISS DAISY DIMITY.

CHAPTER I.

“An open-hearted maiden, true and pure.”

ALMOST everyone slept soundly in Magdala Villa next morning. Everyone but one foolish little damsel, whose foolish little heart and brain would not let her rest with their happy, delicious disquiet.

She tried to lie still as a daylight mouse ; because Una Goodchild was sleeping beside her as soundly as if neither ghosts nor memories of yesterday any longer existed for Una. But after a time it would not

do, for—*he*, that is to say Captain Gascoigne, had said to her last night, “I shall drive past your house to my train at eight o’clock to-morrow morning; but you will not be up by then.” Lying, listening, in the darkened room, Daisy was sure, from faint noises in the kitchen regions, that it *must* be eight o’clock; she was afraid it was long past it; and felt quite bitter against herself for not having risen to look out,—when, with an alarming, “Too-hoo! too-hoo!” the cuckoo clock struck six!

Again for long ages this most silly Daisy lay still, dozing, listening, remembering, imagining, all in a half dream, when a rumbling noise sounded in the distant street. At first, in her confused state, it seemed like thunder; but soon, with a start, she knew the sound to be that of wheels.

Very few cabs or carriages passed Mag-

dala Villa so early ; it must be *his* ! In a trice she had slipped noiselessly out of bed, and was behind the blind peering through a most cautious little slit, as nearer and louder rolled—the milk-cart !

It was of no use going back to bed now. Daisy's blood was up against these practical jokes played upon her by the ironical gods ; she felt obstinate determination that she would and should see Gascoigne that morning, and for a few moments her soft round face wore a perfectly grim expression. So she set about dressing, hoping not to waken Una Goodchild ; but oh ! the agonies of it !

How softly she crept about ! but every chair she touched in the semi-darkness creaked as if it was an injured thing, or grated wickedly on the stained economy boards, surrounding the small centre island of carpet. How the water she so

cautiously poured into the basin seemed a little Niagara cataract, while her softest washings therein sounded like the splashings of the great sea-serpent.

At last, at last she had finished, and glided like a shadow out of the room ; giving one thankful backward glance at the still undisturbed outline of the sleeper. After twice vainly trying to close the door noiselessly, which the lock refused to allow by teasingly shooting open again, Daisy finally gave it an indignant little slam. Gracious ! —she flew downstairs in precipitate dismay, for the noise seemed enough to wake old Rip van Winkel.

She wanted to look out on the street, so entered the drawing-room, where the lazy housemaid had not yet pulled up the Venetians—but then, poor soul ! she had been sitting up awaiting the party till the small hours. Groping her way, Daisy

suddenly tripped over the stumbling-block of a foot-stool, and, with a cry, fell forward upon the sofa, on a dark, long object she had not before perceived. With another cry the object rose, and she felt a sharp blow on her face.

“Oh! Jack—my nose!” she exclaimed, rubbing that hurt feature.

“Goodness gracious, Daisy, my nose! Is that you?” responded Jack, with gruff bewilderment, also rubbing his tingling snubby one. Brother and sister had, in fact, adopted the Fijian form of embrace, and knocked their heads together.

“I quite forgot you were here,” uttered poor Daisy, with rueful regret, after making vague explanations as to her early rising.

“No matter. It’s about time for me to jump up, anyway,” said Jack, with a good-humoured, enormous yawn, as he pulled up the blinds with a vigorous clat-

ter, and then surveyed his companion.

“What a little owl you do look, to be sure! Why, you can’t have had a wink all night.”

“No matter, dear, I can keep winking and blinking all day, you know. Don’t you think it would be nice to open the window and have some fresh air?”

To this insinuating query Jack unsuspectingly agreed by throwing up the sash, and putting half his own body out, resting his hands on the window-sill.

“I say, here’s old Gascoigne coming along in his trap,” he loudly announced, after a few minutes, during which his sister had been trying to gaze round his back. Overcome by illogical shyness, Daisy instantly sprang into the innermost recesses of the room, as the swift rattle of a fast-trotting mare and a dog-cart came up the Khyber Pass Road.

“Hallo! Good morning. How are you?” called out young Dimity, in a sort of whispered shout, calculated not to wake the household, but to carry far, while he helped out these fraternal inquiries by friendly gesticulation; quite unwittingly thus acting Cupid’s messenger.

“All right, thanks! How is everybody in there?” came back in passing accents, as the mare went rushing by. At that Daisy could keep back no longer, but darted again to the window—just in time to see a portion of Gascoigne’s fast receding back, with an excellent view of his impudent little groom, who sat facing her.

No matter! still she *had* seen him.

Daisy turned back again to the drawing-room with a light heart, humming a tune, as if that mere moiety of sight had acted like a dram of elation. And he had asked, “How is everybody?” plainly showing

where his thoughts were; for without reasoning it out with herself little Miss Dimity had vaguely the opinion that such questions, in such cases, meant, "How is the one person who is everybody to me?" implying, as sang the great master in the knowledge of human hearts—

"Thou art my all-the-world . . ."

"O—w!" ejaculated Jack, with a sudden and enormous yawn. "How hungry I am!" At this moment, the door being open, an instance of the curious and frequent sympathy between minds was shown by Fuzzy's voice calling over the stairs,

"I say, Mary—Susan—Mary! Is breakfast never coming? we are starving."

"We can't get it ready no quicker, Miss, please," returned the injured voice of the cook, the kitchen being within easy reach of call at Magdala Villa. And in a still more injured and higher-pitched voice the

tired-out maid added, "And, please, Miss, however am I to carry up seven breakfasts to bed single-handed, if even I had enough trays; but the two old tin ones and the little plated one ——"

"Bother take the trays! Bring up everything to the stairs, then, and we can all slip out of bed and take what we want."

Fuzzy may have meant that the breakfast should be placed on a table at the stairs' foot; but whatever she meant her order was literally fulfilled.

Susan was soon heard sighing up the little back stair with the tea service, whilst Mary came groaning after her with the fried eggs and bacon and toast.

Quoth Jack, grinding his teeth, with the longing to be using them,

"It's too much for me. By the powers above or below stairs! I must make a raid out there for food."

“Oh, Jack—don’t, Jack. I mean, Jack dear, let me go out first and get it for you.”

“Wel—l! If you bring me what I want, you may,” graciously grumbled Master Jack, in permission, as his little sister tripped out deftly to serve him; then he surveyed her with one eye from behind the door.

“Take care, child. Is that brawn you are cutting so thick,—oh, murder! don’t,” and, in agony, he rushed out to the rescue. Hardly had he helped himself, as he loved himself—and before the mustard was on his plate—when the slurring click-clack of bed-room slippers was heard overhead, and Daisy, craning her neck up the well-stairs, whispered,

“Rush, Jack—it’s Pussy in her dressing-gown. Hide——”

“Oh! Jiminy,” wailed poor Jack, snatch-

ing one mouthful of his beloved brawn, and scuttling back to the recesses of the drawing-room, with a highly virtuous air. Softly yawning, and grumbling, shivering a little sleepily, Pussy expressed rather uninterested surprise at the fact of Daisy's being actually dressed and ready to help her.

"I say, do pour me out some tea, dear ; anything will do—just to let me get back to bed. Hi—ho ! I think I can't get up to-day," and with more sighs and yawns and lackadaisical self-pities, Pussy slipped her slow progress aloft again, losing one of the said slippers occasionally.

"Thank heaven she's gone ; and I'm as hungry as a hunter," said Jack, in fervent congratulation, issuing again, and beginning to masticate *à belles dents*, as our neighbours say. "Aren't you hungry ? I'm so hungry. Have some bread and

butter and marmalade ; I'm having some."

But even while his upraised knife was still hovering over the loaf, the starving wretch was deterred by the warning cry of "Fly, Jack !—Here is Birdie coming," and he precipitately fled from the approaching presence of this nymph. Birdie was now heard descending from the bed-room region in a hop-and-go-one fashion ; scolding all the way in a sharp key against Pussy, who was no doubt comfortably snug once more.

"It is too unkind of you not to give me that tea. I'm sure you might know you are not half as tired as me," holding by the balusters with a simulation of bodily exhaustion that did not seem to extend to her mental faculties ; then, with an angry wail, "It is so downright *selfish*!"

The silence from upstairs was of an aggravating nature, suggesting much placid

enjoyment; upon which Birdie, appearing in a white garment and huge opera-cloak of her mother's slovenly wrapped round her, silver bangles still on her arms, and one of yesterday's earrings in her ear, rather snappishly exclaimed,

“Goodness, Daisy, is that you?”

“Let me help you. I could not sleep, really, so I got up. Let me carry up your breakfast,” gently urged Daisy, most anxious for sisterhood's sake to get Birdie and her bangles safely out of the way before her poor dear Jack should become utterly ravenous.

“You really are a good little creature,” returned the young lady, with a mollified air; then, on still further second thoughts, remembering her own interest, “Yes, really you are a *darling*! But wait, you are not giving me half enough jam. I like to eat it with a spoon at breakfast.

And that bacon—you haven't given me the nicest bits; leave those thick ones for Fuzzy—she won't mind."

Whereupon, after piling so many lumps of sugar into her tea that the apex of the pyramid was clearly seen above the liquid, though fast dissolving by the law of capillary attraction, Birdie Cox and her provisions were safely conveyed upstairs by the attendant Daisy, with as much pains as if the latter belonged to the commissariat department in this most military of garrison towns.

"What a mercy *she's* gone!" said Jack, in pious thanksgiving, sneaking back, and setting to work on his oft-deserted meal, perched uncomfortably on the umbrella-stand in the corner. "Keep a watch for the next one, like a good girl. This is what you might truly call 'cut and come again!'"

Daisy dutifully obeyed; but likewise began pouring out her neglected boy's tea with most affectionate carefulness; so, as ill-luck would have it, both were so busy they neither spoke nor heard a sound but that of knife and fork, till there came a light, flying rush downstairs, and round the corner appeared Fuzzy—attired in a long Ulster coat, reaching to her toes, with her hair-fringe in curl-papers.

“Jerusalem!”—uttered Jack. He was really so thunderstruck, he could say no more. With a little cry Fuzzy sprang backwards, but immediately collapsed out of sight in an uncontrollable fit of laughter. “I’m so tremendously sorry,” Jack apologised from below, in tones of mingled penitence and consolation; “but, after all, what does it matter? You surely need not mind with *only me*.”

Young Dimity was of opinion, like many

people, that one person may steal a horse whilst another may not look over the hedge; and that evidently he was the one man who might steal the horse. Fuzzy seemed rather to agree in his possession of peculiar privileges.

“Well, I’d rather it was you than almost anybody else,” she brokenly ejaculated from the upper staircase, where she was, still half stifled under the influence of mortified mirth; her good humour raising her to a much more exalted height than before in Jack’s opinion. “Only, Daisy—do bring my breakfast up, like a dear.”

So Daisy, in turn, waited upon her; and felt glad she had got up so early for two reasons, thus being called upon to make herself useful.

“They are a funny family! But one must take people as you find them, and, after all, they are some sort of cousins of

ours, I believe," philosophically uttered Jack, by and by, in confidence to his sister; as, having finished, he pushed his empty plate away among the other breakfast things, which was a trick Daisy secretly did wish he would give up.

"*Our* cousins, Jack—how can you say so?"

"I don't say so; they say so. I know nothing about it" (preparing to rush to barracks).

"It is only Mrs. Cox who is connected with our *step*-mother," corrected Daisy, severely, for this was really a matter in which Jack's ignorance was to be reproved. "And they are only second cousins, once remov——"

"Good-bye," cried Jack, before she could explain the family ramifications to her own satisfaction, and was off.

Daisy then proceeded rather sleepily to

collect some more breakfast for Una Goodchild ; rightly judging the latter lady would not understand that she could find it on the stairs.

Mary, the weary maid, uplifted her voice in benediction at this unexpected help.

“ Lor’ bless you, Miss, the other young ladies never think of giving a hand’s turn at anything, though missis herself often does. But she’s awful bad with headache this morning, or she’d surely have seen to the strange young lady herself. Wait a minute, please ; missis gave particular directions to take up the little plated tray to Miss Goodchild ; and she unlocked me a napkin herself, and—oh ! the good old cup and saucer as stands on the drawing-room cabinet.”

Daisy, on receiving the latter, silently dusted them.

“ How good you are ! ” cried Una,

bouncing wide-awake, in her usual impulsive fashion, and the minute after looking at Daisy with dreamy eyes. "How could you awake so early? I never slept so soundly. And, dear me, what trouble I must be giving you all! How good it was of your cousins to take me in!"

Said Daisy, rather pedantically—for really this was a mistake that though not serious, or what one would like to call compromising, still ought to be set to rights.

"I must tell you that the Coxes are not really my cousins. My stepmother and Mrs. Cox are only second cousins once re—*moved!*"

CHAPTER II.

“ I once was a bachelor, both early and young,
And I courted a fair maid, with a flattering tongue.
I courted her, I wooed her, I followed her then,
And I promised to marry her, but never told her
when.”

THE gardens and part of the grounds of Fairlawns, Mr. Goodchild's home, had been thrown open for the purpose of holding a fancy fair therein.

Poor Mr. Goodchild ! he hardly knew what it was all about ; he was so used to being plagued in like manner by being asked to allow school-children, Oddfellows, Marstown picnic roysterers, and Friendly Brothers, to hold their feasts in his

demesne ; and leave, in token of gratitude, fluttering newspaper scraps, broken bottles, and fragments of buns and pie-crust, disfiguring the grass for days.

He never liked to say no, being a weakly, good-natured philanthropist, and, the neighbours, added, an oddity. Some of these even called him "that maniac, Goodchild." Their excellent reason for this latter term was that the Goodchilds had been Conservatives for centuries—till this one, inheriting the estate as a minor, had, on coming of age, declared himself Liberal.

Also he had queer whims, unlike those of his neighbours or forefathers, such as refusing to remain at college, or go into the army ; preferring to muddle away his youth making bad oil-sketches, beginning half a hundred collections of old pictures, older rusty armour, oldest coins, and him-

self only knew what else of old clothes, bones and stones, of which he had defrauded the ragman, dust heap, or museums, thought the neighbours. In all which collections he seldom got beyond the beginning.

Then he spent much of his life abroad, “jabbering foreign languages, as if he liked them better than his own,” as a neighbour squire again once reported. In fact he was a man with a grain more originality than his fellows, which just led him astray; two grains more, and he might have been a man of mark.

He had crowned his progressing isolation among his fellows by his marriage. No one knew who his wife had been—could anything be more suspicious? Presently some more inquiring spirit discovered that no one could know who she was, because she did not know herself. She had been brought up in a convent in France, under

the belief that her parents had died, having at least left her sufficient support. Her kind guardians there had been told no more. Mr. Goodchild, meeting her by chance, asked no more; never learned more. He was satisfied—but the neighbours, oh! of course they were not.

Poor Mrs. Goodchild might have held her rightful position, nevertheless, had she been a woman of spirit, or even of worldly tact. But she was mild, retiring, humble-minded; and wrapped up in her six tall sons.

The squire was wrapped up in his somewhat clever daughter; who had a decided mental resemblance to himself.

To this family group the Coxes, Jack Dimity, and his sister were introduced by Una when they arrived in the Fairlawns gardens on the day of the Fancy Fair.

The grounds, locally considered “among

the sights to be seen" for their picturesqueness, were all alive with crowds, who looked upon the fair as a glorious holiday; and, since it was held for a Marstown institute, had come out thence to patronise the Punch and Judy show, the shooting gallery, Aunt Sally, and the refreshment tents, in particular. There were pretty stalls, draped with cool muslin, placed under the shade of the three patriarchal cedars that were the pride of Fairlawns. A row in a gaudy gondola could be had on a tiny pond, among the astonished mandarin ducks and an indignant Egyptian goose. Two bands were braying different valse at either end of the gardens; and in the evening there might be dancing on the grass in the trellised rose-plots. The roses were all full-blown in the height of their summer beauty; the walls were heavy with them; the greensward aflush with lower

masses ; and the day was one of the most gorgeous of a hot summer.

The Coxes were quite radiant ; for, with much forethought, Una Goodchild, who had invited Daisy to help her in selling at Mrs. Goodchild's own stall, prevented all possible jealousy at this especial honour by imploring Fuzzy Cox to be a Pretty Skirmisher—and molest distant wary groups who would not come near danger. As war-ammunition against the enemy, she was provided with a trayful of the most unsaleable knitted pence-bags, baby socks, and similar small horrors. To please all, Una had actually beforehand asked the two youngest Miss Coxes to personate rustic dairymaids, and milk an Alderney cow, to be garlanded, gilt-horned, and tethered amongst roses, and lilies, and daffydowndillies, by a streamlet's side.

“It was quite my own idea ! Isn't it

deliciously pastoral ? And you two would just look the characters," she had earnestly said ; so with flattered pride Pussy and Birdie accepted the task.

" We must dress *à la Watteau*," declared Birdie, and forthwith kilted up her muslin gown over a gay petticoat ; and bought a new pair of cheap shoes with seven little buckles, and such high heels that she tottered.

Pussy slowly, with less originality, followed her example, adding a muslin hat, made so transparent that her head could be seen distinctly through it. The effect was funny ; but Birdie, indignant at being outdone, forthwith not only hurriedly stitched herself another, but also supplanted her sister by the help of two very cheap white ostrich feathers.

Pussy silently put on a knot of ribbon and a rose.

And now they were all here : all eager for the fun.

“ Only I should not advise you to begin milking now,” said Una, who, with the cares of the day upon her shoulders, had collected her really good though often abstracted wits, and now made an excellent hostess. “ Later on in the evening, when your gentlemen friends have come, you can persuade them to have syllabub, you know.”

Of course ! It seemed quite an easy thing beforehand to Pussy and Birdie to make the whole Marstown garrison drink syllabub ; and they had gaily invited all their favourite officer-friends, and the Smeeth girls, and others to come out to Fairlawns for the day, “ for Miss Goodchild wants *us* to sell for her ! ”

Now they went off to seek out their town friends, saying, with a sprightly air

of being quite at home in Fairlawns, “So you have come, dear.—Oh, *we* are selling for Miss Goodchild. She slept at our house the other night after a picnic we all had up the river; and then she asked us especially. Isn’t she a charming girl!—so unaffected; such sweet manners!”

Mrs. Cox, with an ancient Indian shawl drawn gracefully round her really handsome figure, concealing the shining appearance of an aged, black silk gown, was purely happy. She undulated amongst the groups, greeting her friends with even more elegance and warmth than usual, as if to show she was not proud; hinting at the fact of herself and girls being invited guests, and not come-by-chances, with almost a subdued air. Good soul! she feared it would seem in bad taste to appear exultant over her less fortunate friends, to the poorest of whom she was especially soft and

conciliatory that day—only her eyes betraying her deliciousness of bliss.

Crowds now surrounded the Goodchilds' stall, all eager to patronise the wares of the young lady of Fairlawns. Too soon Una and Daisy were hot, busy, and wishing they had ten heads, that they might satisfy all the grasping old ladies who wanted to pay a compliment, but also have their money's worth—and all the delightful male beings who had "put so much money in their pocket, and did not care how it was spent."

"Oh! Mr. Dimity, I can't speak to you now," gasped Miss Goodchild, smiling and flushed, as Jack, who was always hanging about their stall, tried to draw her into conversation. "Would you mind raffling this frightful green cushion for me, as no one will buy it. Don't you know how? Oh!—one of the Miss Coxes will help you."

Off went Jack, rather disgusted, whilst Birdie, who had been uselessly trying to attract his attentions hitherto, offered her services with glee.

As to Fuzzy—she was like an erratic rocket, rushing hither and thither through groups that scattered with dismay at sight of her tray, which was constantly emptied and as steadily replenished.

When her Marstown acquaintances, seeing her in the distance, would dive behind shrubbery clumps, or flee through vistas of greenhouses, lo and behold! it was of no use: for when they emerged, hot and sneaking, Fuzzy was sure to be at the other side, meeting them in the face with her gay war-cry of, “I’ve caught you now! What will you buy?” When poor Colonel Dunn at last fairly took to his heels, everyone turned to watch the chase, with base enjoyment; till at last the hero of a hundred

fight was actually run to earth among the pea-blossoms, where he was hiding in vain. Then out rang the fair pursuant's voice of victory again, "I've caught you ; now what will you buy ?—What, no money left ! Come, then, though I'm as poor as a church-mouse myself, I don't mind lending you five shillings."

Returning from this successful raid, Miss Cox saw Daisy speaking across her counter—with an air of greater familiarity than was usual in that modest maiden towards her Marstown new acquaintances—to a clergyman dressed in the height of the High Church fashion, which seemed to the irreverent Fuzzy a black dressing-gown, roped and tasselled.

"Who is your friend, the parson in petticoats?" she carelessly whispered, flinging herself down on a seat, and panting. "I've been trying to make him buy

a flower for his button-hole for ever so long, and nothing would induce him ; but he wanted a housewife, he said, which I hadn't got, so I very nearly offered him myself."

"Oh ! Fuzzy," exclaimed Daisy, scandalised. "Why, that is our clergyman at home, at Elm Hall. He is down near here on a visit. I told you he was supposed to be vowed to celibacy, didn't I?—And to offer him a flower!"

"Well, now that I look again, he has no button-hole. But it is rather a pity he means to be an old bachelor—not that I ever cared for curates. But he is very handsome . . . why don't you introduce him to me?"

Fuzzy turned her head as she spoke. Good gracious!—the clerical object of her remarks had come up close behind them. Both girls blushed, and were in-

clined to laugh in confusion, but Daisy mischievously introduced the Reverend Adolphus Younghusband, who blushed likewise all over his fair face, up to the fair little lovelocks on his forehead. The irrepressible Fuzzy, whose spirits seemed at fever height this day, gave him an arch glance (and really she looked very pretty, fanning herself under the cedar-tree).

“ You were very hard-hearted, you only bought three dolls and a knitted nightcap from me.”

The young Adolphus deepened his delicate complexion again under her glance, to Daisy’s surprise.

“ Indeed, if it had not been for your persuasions ! . . . the dolls are in my pocket now, and I am afraid of sitting on them ! I intend them for the poor children of my parish ; and I have already once disgraced myself by pulling out the nightcap instead

of my handkerchief." Then he added, recovering his self-possession, "I must confess I won a hideous green cushion besides in a raffle, and its possession made me so unhappy, I hid it under a tree for whoever may chance to find it."

"Nonsense!" cried Fuzzy, springing up with refreshed energies. "*Where?* Let us raffle it again! . . . You might help me to sell, if you won't buy any more—will you?" and she gave him a second glance prompted by pure malice, because of his supposed leanings towards celibacy.

"I—I shall be very happy—in such a good cause as—as that of this Fair," stammered the young man, with a deprecating look towards Daisy and her brother Jack, who were enjoying his evident confusion. He added to Fuzzy, as they moved off, "I have been admiring all day the diligence and energy with which you have been sell-

ing, Miss Cox. May I carry your tray?— is it not too heavy for you? It is so good of you to let me help you, for I feel quite a stranger in the land here. I know none of the ladies excepting Miss Dimity, who so kindly introduced me to you; and that is such a novel sensation.”

Fuzzy, flushed with success, and intoxicated with the ardour of her own exertions, made the most of her capture; thinking, with her spirits at fever-height, what a joke she would have with Major Hodge and the Marstown girls over her amazing flirtation.

Meanwhile the hot afternoon wore on; the constant popping reports from the shooting-gallery echoed; Punch and Judy squeaked; the crowds still came and bought, and went with increasing mirth and noise, as the prices of admission grew lower—but the spirits of the Fairlawns saleswomen

began to droop—no wonder!—under the prolonged patronage of the mixed multitude.

Daisy all this while had been working on with noiseless steadiness; always at Una's elbow whenever the latter turned, hot and flurried, for help; always ready with twine or scissors, produced from the pockets of a pretty apron, whilst Una was tossing about everything wildly, or groveling amongst back-ground litter in search of a knife never found. And when the absent-minded girl, in her eager enthusiasm, would pour a perfect Pactolus of sovereigns into the shilling box—and streams of silver amongst the gold—it was Daisy again who always set all to rights.

“You are the dearest creature in the wide world,” cried Una, thanking her rapturously again and again. “What should I have done without you—yes, and

your brother too!—now that Miss Cox has deserted us just when our work was at its very height?”

For a little while ago the burly form of Major Hodge, with his attendant satellite Mr. Jones, had been seen arriving; and Fuzzy thereat thrust her tray into the hands of the Reverend Adolphus Younghusband, basely bidding him “just make the best bargains he could.”

Infant hoods then went indeed at a dead loss; babies' socks might almost be had for the asking; as the shame-faced curate only sought to disperse these wares as rapidly as possible. He felt quite deserted, too, among strangers, like the forlorn Strephon lamenting—

“Ye poor little sheep, ah! well may ye stray,
While sad is your shepherd and Clio away.”

Then it was that Jack Dimity, seeing his chance, offered his help at the stalls, and

managed to make very fair progress in Miss Goodchild's friendship ; that between her and his sister being fast cemented. Daisy had seen Major Hodge before Fuzzy, however. He had come straight to her stall, and, leaning his elbows thereon, with a friendly grin, said,

“What do you think—we have got our orders ; I for one must leave Marstown the day after to-morrow.”

“Oh ! are you not sorry ?” Daisy exclaimed, with a world of commiseration in her voice (but it was not for him).

“Well, haw—haw, I don't know. This place has grown very hot, you see,” with a meaning twinkle in his blue, deceitful, somewhat “swivel eye.” “And then we are going to Jersey ; cool sea-breezes there, and lots of pretty girls.”

“How tired you young ladies look !—hot work ; thirsty, eh ?” cried Colonel Dunn,

just then coming up with a cheery smile and kindly bustle. "'Pon my word, you should all come and have some tea. I assure you I've already carried twenty-three unsteady cups of tea, in sloppy saucers, from that tent, and here I'm at it again—still coming and going, like Mulligan's blanket, eh, Miss Goodchild. What! you don't understand the proverb? Why—the blanket was always on the move between home and the pawnshop."

"Would it not be a good time now for syllabub," asked Una Goodchild, with true bazaar eagerness resolved to turn even their own thirst into twopence each.

The signal passed around; and soon all the world was moving like a parched army towards the single grazing Alderney with its pretty ribbons, whilst there was a general cry of "Where are they gone to—our pretty dairymaids?"

Poor Mrs. Cox, in feverish anxiety lest her dear girls should miss their chance of being distinguished, fluttered up and down the gravel walks (where they obviously were not!) giving little chirping, agitated calls.

"I'll engage I'll find them out," at last valiantly declared Jack Dimity, so, followed by a more timid search party, consisting of Daisy, Una; Lee, and Colonel Dunn, he dived—without hesitation—amongst the shrubberies. A petticoat's flutter and a little giggle revealed Birdie hiding close by among the laurels; within hearing of all the calls; and in the company of Captain O'Donoghue.

"I thought, as you didn't seem very anxious for my company just now, that you should not have it again just so soon as you wished," she pertly remarked to Jack, tossing her head; although evidently

she was reconciled to his defection by the delight of having drawn to her side difficult O'Donoghue, who had hitherto patronised Pussy. Miss Pussy herself was still to be sought, when, oh, horror!—adown a lone alley, Daisy, Colonel Dunn, and Smiler Lee, who were ahead, espied Fuzzy and Major Hodge, only partially veiled by the foliage of a weeping willow, under which they were appropriately sitting. Quite desperate as to the chance of passers-by, Fuzzy was reposing with her head on her companion's shoulder, and his arm round her waist, loudly dissolving in tears which her swain seemed trying to staunch by a generous application of his own red silk handkerchief. Daisy sprang back, and, with a presence of mind perfectly extraordinary to herself, cried to the others, "Oh, this way is so damp, and leads to nothing, I am sure!—let us go back."

“Very damp,” echoed the Smiler, suppressing a convulsion of chuckles, and adding, aside, “Oh, you are irresistible!—what a good-natured girl you are!” Then in another aside and a fresh ecstasy of internal mirth, “And this sort of way leads to nothing—does it, Colonel?”

Good-natured Colonel Dunn shook his head rather pityingly, and muttered in answer,

“Well; well; I’m afraid not—it’s a great pity, a great pity. But he’s not well off, is he; and the poor girl has nothing, has she? Dear, dear, I’m afraid it will only be the old story—‘A tocherless dame sits lang at hame.’”

Daisy quite loved Colonel Dunn for the kindly regret of that speech, which she accidentally overheard.

But now the gentle, blushing Pussy had been likewise discovered somewhere, and

somehow in company with Mr. Jones; so nothing more seemed to hinder the brewing of syllabub.

The Watteau dairymaids (shade of Watteau, how very British they looked!) gaily acknowledged they had never tried milking before, but "Of course it was quite easy!" Down sat Pussy first amidst an admiring crowd, on a charming little wicker chair. The Alderney turned on this unusual milking-stool a suspicious eye—then swish went her tail full across Pussy's face, with a most aggrieved blow.

"Nasty brute," cried Pussy, springing up, with her feelings much injured and cheeks insulted, as an irrepressible laugh broke from the gaping crowd.

"Let me try," cried Birdie, with undaunted self-conceit.

Worse and worse! The poor cow, growing frightened, made a few uneasy plunges,

then with a sound kick upset the milking-stool, empty milk-pail, and all ! whilst the milkmaid, frightened but unhurt, half flew, half fell into a dozen arms, and was rescued by a dozen heroic hands almost in hysterics.

CHAPTER III.

“I have sold all my trumpery ; not a counterfeit stone, not a riband, glass, pomander, brooch, table-book, ballad, knife, tape, glove, shoe-tye, bracelet, horn-ring . . . they throng who should buy first ; as if my trinkets had been hallowed, and brought a benediction to the buyer !”

THE little cow was led off, gaily whisking her tail in victorious disgrace.

Miss Goodchild immediately, scanning her bazaar populace with the eye of a leader, and anxious to hide the chagrin of the milkmaidens

“ All forlorn,

Who milked the cow with the crumpled horn,”

laughingly drove all her friends to the tea-

tent. Here they all sat on wobbling wooden forms placed on the uneven grass ; and made very merry over stale pastry round the festive board, which was indeed the right word in the right place, being, like our ancestors' tables, simply boards on trestles. Every Jill now seemed to have her Jack ; every dame a cavalier to bring her tea—excepting one. Daisy had no *cavalier servente*, which quite distressed her friend Una.

“ This is not like our picnic-party, is it, dear ? I am so sorry you have got no one to bring your tea.”

“ Don't be sorry,” laughed Daisy, brightening up from her staid mood of the day, adding, “ for though I've got no one, as you say, to look after me, I want no one.”

“ Don't say that—for you've got *me* !” cried the gay voice of the Smiler at her elbow. Quicksilver flirt that he was, smiling

like the sun in royal impartiality on all, he had not been at all devoted to her hitherto that day.

At the same moment old Dr. Cox, who had lately arrived—intercepting deftly the Smiler's advance—trotted up to Daisy, whom he also had hitherto disregarded, exclaiming,

“ Ah ! fair charmer, do I hear you say you want some one to attend upon your wants ? Now don't mind that young man ; he's an artful deceiver, I assure you.” So saying, he inserted his own corpulent person comfortably into the chair Lee had just been about to take, adding, “ Come ! instead of thinking only of these young beaux, give an old man the pleasure of admiring you, like the sensible, nice girl you are. Eh, Miss Goodchild, is not our dear young friend a sweet girl ?” And he beamed from ear to ear upon Una, who, as

usual that day, sat close on Daisy's other side, having conceived an exceeding affection for her. (At that moment Daisy felt as if the old doctor was a humbug, seeing the only other empty place was beside his own daughter Birdie ; but how *she* would have privately scolded the doctor for going there when Lee might have had it.) Unanswered with coldness, springing brusquely out of her seat,

“My mother wishes particularly to make your acquaintance, Dr. Cox. Will you come and be introduced to her?”

The little doctor stared. At that moment Mrs. Goodchild was seated amongst some of the county magnates, who were, as they called it amongst themselves, “doing the civil” to the quiet mistress of the place, who cared so little for them. But before he could fairly grasp the honour, in his excessive delight, impetuous

Una carried him off like a whirlwind, and returning, whispered,

“There! isn’t that a deliverance? People think me so very absent-minded and unobserving, I know; but for all that, when I wake up sometimes, I can see what is real or sham as well as anyone. I rather liked, too, interrupting those old dowagers who are cackling round poor mamma. Lady de Hautenbas looked so huffed at my pushing Dr. Cox amongst them all, as if he were as good as themselves. They think me so unconventional, which is just what I wish.”

“Grand girl!” whispered the Smiler, resuming his place beside Daisy, with a confidential air. “It was so good of her, for I was just wanting to have a private talk with you. You always do me so much good; you cheer me up.”

Never before having seen Smiler Lee in

want of cheering up, Daisy perceived, with some surprise, that his little godship's visage seemed veiled by a slight fog.

"What were you doing all afternoon—who were you with?" she asked. She had hit the mark.

"Well—well, I wanted to be with Miss Le Hunt. *You* know how I admired her the other day—you are such a good, sensible girl, and not a bit jealous," began poor Lee, fairly longing to bubble over with his disgust. "And she told me, too, she hoped to meet me here, you know; and all that sort of thing, don't you know; but ever since I came she has been so taken up with that man over there with her now, that she won't even look at me."

"What—that ugly man," as Daisy saw one with a large nose, and a large eyeglass; and the general facial outline of an elephant with a white moustache.

“Looks a great haw-haw fellow, doesn’t he? Yes, I knew you’d say that, like a sensible girl, as you are,” eagerly assented the Smiler; and, recovering himself, he flung five smiles on her in succession, and twisted up one moustache-tip that had grown limp over his unkind, lost love. “*He’s* in the —th Lancers, that’s what it is ; so, of course, a poor, ordinary soldier like me has no chance against a dashing cavalry officer, that is to say, in most young ladies’ opinions !” (with exceeding bitterness). “That is what riles me so in Miss Le Hunt throwing me over for him, for I had *such* a high opinion of that girl before ! The fact is, you meet with a great deal of ingratitude and bad feeling in this world, and I have a very great mind to throw up society altogether,” with an enormous sigh, which surely should have been enough to utterly melt society’s heart.

Daisy, with sympathetic scornfulness, suggested,

“Perhaps he has some attraction for Miss Le Hunt, that you and I are too dull to discover.”

“Do you think the shape of his collars is better than mine?” anxiously inquired Lee—his proof of confidence in a girl was asking her opinion concerning the cut of his clothes, for he and his friend O'Donoghue made dress a matter of competitive examination and their collars of monthly meditation.

Major Hodge and Fuzzy had now come into the tea-tent with a rather slinking air. But soon the gay Freebooter's usual habits of mind re-asserted themselves, and slyly at first—then, more boisterously—he began to poke jokes at his friends. *His* heart, he wished humorously to demonstrate, would, at any rate, not be broken to-morrow by

the "girl he left behind him." Poor Fuzzy sat near. But she was not so ready in her mirth somehow as the facile major, though far more at pains to conceal her melancholy. So she took refuge in aggressiveness; and with the tip of her little nose as red as the edges of her eyelids, while her speech was very acid, she made herself as unlike her better self as could be. The bold Freebooter's wordy raids were principally into the boglands of his young follower Jones's understanding. For this youth, being less thoroughly used to leave-takings, looked rather troubled in his heavy mind; and occasionally glanced at Pussy with a sheepish air, as, sitting very close to him, she frequently sighed or whispered in his ear.

"Cod-fish, you brute! what a brute you are, Cod-fish!" said Major Hodge, addressing his friend Jones by his nickname,

evidently with a view to cheer him.

The Cod-fish grinned; and, having no such fire of light raillery and sparkling wit as his superior, contented himself with gazing round at the company for approbation, and stuffing an enormous piece of bread, piled mountains high with jam, into his mouth.

“How ill you will be to-night, Mr. Jones,” pursued his friend. “Won’t Mr. Jones be ill to-night?” he asked of everyone. The peculiar flavour of this joke now lay in so politely calling the Cod-fish *Mr. Jones*.

Leaving the others to the continued enjoyment of this funny conversation, Una and Daisy rose with a business-like air to resume their labours, closely followed by Jack and Smiler Lee. Just outside the tent, they thus became witnesses of a rather noteworthy incident.

Poor Mrs. Cox had hitherto, on various airy pretexts, refused all invitations to come and have tea. The truth was that tea cost a shilling a-piece ; and though she had cheerfully urged her daughters to go, being anxious they should “do everything like the rest of the world,” she was always ready to pinch herself for economy. So—being very hungry, the good lady had now stolen up when the rest were gone, and surreptitiously bought herself a vulgar bun. She had hardly begun to eat it, however, when Mrs. Goodchild wandered by, and with languid, abstracted kindness stopped to have a little conversation. To be caught eating a penny bun by the lady of Fairlawns herself, who had invited the Coxes ; patronized them, so to say, through her daughter ; and who doubtless expected everyone to support the bazaar to the uttermost end of their purses ! Mrs.

Cox was utterly confounded!—humiliated! so popping the wretched bun behind her back in abasement of spirit, she gave a pale, abashed smile to her hostess, while trying to look perfectly composed.

“Hallo! Look! I say, do you see behind there? Won’t there be fun?” murmured the Smiler and Jack at this moment, in huge delight. For up behind Mrs. Cox—all unconscious—they now saw a naughty urchin creeping. A “little vulgar boy,” who had evidently fixed the twinkle in the corner of his eye on the bun that ill-fated lady held behind her back.

“Tea, do you say? Oh! no more, thank you, dear Mrs. Goodchild. So good, so kind of you to think of asking me,” said Mrs. Cox, meekly. “But I am not at all hungry now.”

Hey, presto! The bun was whipped smartly out of her hand at the words, and

off made the young robber with his prize. Mrs. Cox did give a slight start ; they saw her ; but, with wonderful composure, she scarcely, *scarcely* looked round. Only just enough to see it was no dear friend who had played her such a practical joke—then anxiously scanned Mrs. Goodchild's face, to see had she seen.

Thank goodness, no ! The greater lady's countenance was still an amiable blank.

“ Oh ! Jack, I know for certain she has had nothing to eat all this day,” pityingly uttered Daisy, whilst her brother and Lee were sinfully overcome with suppressed appreciation of the situation. Mrs. Goodchild, satisfied, had gently strayed away.

“ Well, she shall have something, then,” exclaimed Jack, recovering himself. “ She's a good woman, I declare ; and I'll treat her to a dozen cups of tea, and to all the buns left in the tent if she likes.” So away he

went, and in the wooing tones of a hearty young British lion insisted, in spite of Mrs. Cox's half-hearted remonstrances, in tucking her arm under his, and carrying her off to be royally fed.

The evening came on ; the stalls were emptied, save for some veriest refuse of knitted trash ; the Marstown crowds were slowly going homewards, cracking jokes and nuts ; and but few people were left in the Fairlawns gardens, where the dusk was falling, and a nightingale beginning to sing.

“ Ah ! how glad I am they are all gone,” cried Una Goodchild, brusquely, pulling off her hat to cool her aching temples, as she and Daisy stood under one of the grand old cedars. “ They have taken away the flavour of oranges and ginger-beer that offended my nostrils all day. Now one can breathe freely again. Do you ever

ask yourself at night, dear: What has the day brought forth? I wonder what this day has brought forth in especial to any of the people here."

"Not much to me," said Daisy, staidly.

She was thinking to herself, however, that it had brought the end of a foolish dream to poor Fuzzy; that it had brought disappointment and anger to Birdie; that it had apparently laid the foundations of a mutual liking between Jack and Una herself.

"The day has not brought much to you—you say," echoed Una; suddenly waking out of a state of dream into which she used often to fall by fits, though again rousing by starts a few moments after. "No, don't say that, for it has brought us better acquaintance, dear. I never had a girl friend before—I never cared to have one—but, if you don't think me too hasty in

saying so, I feel as if we were friends after to-day. Dear me! it is such a curious sensation. I feel quite rich."

On which she impulsively pressed Daisy's arm fondly; adding, with her usual startling frankness, without waiting for more answer than could be read in Daisy's astonished smile and pleased blush,

"Dear me, why was not Captain Gascoigne here to-day? You liked him, did you not? Are you not sorry he was not here?"

"Yes, I liked him," answered Daisy, in a sobered tone, with a sudden beating of her heart, that said, rather wildly, "liked him—yes! and do like him!—and always shall like him!" But then to herself she said in mind, "*I am almost glad he was not here! For whenever he is near, I never know whether it is not more pain than pleasure, I am so troubled beforehand lest he should not*

care to speak to me ; and when he is speaking all my foolish wits go, and will not answer him rightly ; and when he is gone such doubts and fears rack me all night long that perhaps he thought little of me—and will never come near me any more ! . . . But still—but still what a delicious evening to have walked with him ; and how he would have enjoyed its beauty and that nightingale, as no else here would ! . . .”

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CHAPTER IV.

“Two nymphs both nearly of an age,
 Of numerous charms possessed,
 A warm dispute once chanced to wage,
 Whose temper was the best.

“The worth of each had been complete,
 Had both alike been mild :
 But one, although her smile was sweet,
 Frowned oftener than she smiled.

“And in her humour, when she frowned,
 Would raise her voice and roar,
 And shake with fury to the ground
 The garland that she wore.”

OUT in the street, the day after the fancy fair, as Daisy was walking with the Coxes, some of the Marstown young men familiarly joined them. These latter

were at no pains to conceal their satisfaction at the departure of a regiment which contained several men like Major Hodge, Captain O'Donoghue, and Mr. Jones, who had so long outrivalled them in the opinion of the Marstown young ladies.

"It will be ebb-tide with you to-morrow, won't it, Miss Cox?" said one, with delicate chaff.

"And low water with Miss Pussy, too," said another, adding, in a tone of mock sympathy, "Come, now; how do you ever expect to live through to-morrow?"

"I mean to cry the whole day," softly answered Pussy, affectedly inclining her head to one side; secretly pleased that her forlorn future state and intended woe should place her, she was convinced, in an interesting light. At this there was a general laugh.

"And I," declared Fuzzy, with a reck-

less air, "mean to lock myself in all day and night and *howl!*" There was a still greater outburst of laughter at this sally, which rather horrified Daisy, when she found her arm taken by Fuzzy, who whispered, "Come away from them with me, dear; won't you? Good-bye," she added to the rest, with a defiant air. "We are off to buy handkerchiefs."

"They don't believe me; but I mean it," she bitterly added to Daisy. "I do mean it, every word."

And she did keep her word—excepting in buying the handkerchiefs.

The next day, indeed, neither Pussy nor her eldest sister came downstairs; though Birdie appeared for breakfast in high spirits, and began playing popular waltzes at a thundering hand-gallop immediately afterwards.

"Don't, my child," said her mother, im-

ploringly ; adding, with a deprecating side-look at the guest, “ You know your sisters have both a headache. I am afraid the calves’-foot jelly we had last night at tea must have disagreed with them.”

In her heart Daisy for one thought this most extremely probable, seeing the jelly was in reality made of strong cow’s heel ; however, she by-and-by went upstairs to see if she could do any good.

“ Come in,” softly moaned Pussy, in answer to a quiet knock, and Daisy found the blinds drawn down, and the patient very comfortably in bed, with an unmistakeable air of having been mildly dozing.

“ What is the matter with me, do you say ?” in answer to gentle inquiries. “ Why, I think anyone might know that I—I—I am quite broken-hearted,” and, with an excellent little attempt at sobbing, Pussy began to inhale smelling-salts, and squeez-

ed out a tear or two, or seemed to do so by the help of a handkerchief.

Leaving this mourning dove as soon as was seemly to the secret consolation of a novel that slyly peeped out under the pillow, Daisy went with much livelier sympathy to the other door.

“Who is that? Go away, do, and leave me in peace,” was called out harshly from within. “Oh! it’s you, is it?” followed in somewhat milder, muffled tones, and there was the sharp click of a bolt being withdrawn by means of a long cord, the end of which Fuzzy kept beside her bed. Daisy, entering, stumbled on a breakfast-tray, that had plainly been only taken inside the room in compliance with motherly entreaties; but had, then, just been set down untasted. Here the blinds were drawn up, and the light fell garishly on a hot, flushed face, and eyes sore with crying,

that stared almost repellantly at the light and at Daisy. "Bolt the door again, do. I can't bear any of those others," she sharply said; then, as Daisy softly came beside her, and hesitatingly asked, "What is the matter?" the girl buried her head on her guest's shoulder.

"What is the matter?—only that I am a fool, dear!" Fuzzy answered, with agitated self-contempt, under her breath. "All women are fools, I begin to believe; and I am a worse one than most, to torment myself so about a man who never cared—— At least, no, I do believe he did care; in his own way, you know . . . Don't abuse him to me, dear, just yet; my sisters tell me he was a great old fat flirt; they want to make me think less of him—and by-and-by maybe I shall agree with them, but just yet I'd rather not . . ." Then after a little while she went on, more passionately,

“Oh! dear, I am sick of my life here! I wish I could live in the depths of the country like you, and not have to ‘keep up appearances’ before people. It must be all peaceful and innocent there; with no love-affairs for men to laugh about, and for women to cry over.”

“Come back with me to my home, dear Fuzzy,” urged Daisy, in a most pitying and comforting tone. “Come back with me to Elm Hall; they will all be so glad to see you. My father seemed quite distressed in his letter that I should be enjoying your hospitality, and yet that none of you have made a promise to visit us. And Polly will be delighted.”

So Fuzzy promised; with the feeling that any change would be blessed. Green fields and still woods and waters would rest her aching eyes, that now wearied of Marstown chimneys, and the future sight of fresh

red-coats ; the uneventful Arcadian life of a comfortable country house in summer-time, in the depths of a sleepy county, would dull the smarts of wounded vanity and fancy (whether it was really a stronger feeling who can say ?), and all the stings that the uttered or imagined sneers of other girls would inflict.

Rattle ! rattle ! in the next room was now heard ; Birdie's voice jangling in sharp, shrewish tones with Pussy's softer, more guttural remonstrances.

Then came a thumping, and dragging of furniture, as it seemed.

"What is she doing now?" murmured poor Fuzzy, with an aching head. Daisy then heard her own name called, and went out to see.

Birdie, with a colour much heightened above even her natural strawberries-and-cream complexion, was pushing

and pulling along the famous dummy.

“There!!—I am bringing this thing to your room, for I’m NOT going to be plagued with it any more. Your brother made it, so you may keep it; or else give it to Miss Goodchild, since he is so fond of her,” she snapped out, giving the lay figure a vicious shake and shove, with a look as if she would rather have liked doing the same by Daisy, Jack, and Una Goodchild, all three. Daisy rather felt what maid-servants call “a turn,” but meekly said,

“Let me help you,” and, despite Birdie’s biting retorts that she wanted no help, and only requested leave not to trouble her, Daisy caught up the offending object in her own plump arms, and being, though small, as strong as a Shetland pony, easily put it in her own room.

Birdie was now of a raspberry hue all over her face; but the intense surprised

quietness of this "stranger lass" whom she had just tried to insult prevented any further outburst. Daisy's plump dignity was in its own way something so solid, though her face was as soft as a baby saint's, that it made itself respected.

This scene over, little Miss Dimity returned to look after poor Fuzzy's headache.

She drew down her blinds; shook up her pillows; bathed her forehead; and finally left her refreshed and quieted to sleep awhile—with the prospect of going out together later for a quiet walk far from the Mall, the streets, shops, and all their attractions, which generally were so engrossing to the Cox minds.

But as Daisy leisurely went downstairs with her quiet step—wondering how she could best this day succeed in mutely sympathising with Mrs. Cox's silently

distressed face, propitiating Birdie's ill-temper, bearing with Pussy's mock grief, and comforting Fuzzy, for whom she had most genuine pity and liking—her own name, uttered in a loud and angry, gibing tone through the open drawing-room door, made her pause a moment.

“Daisy Dimity, indeed ! now don't praise her up any more to me, mamma, for I am just sick of her,” uttered Birdie. “You thought yourself so very clever in asking her here ; you were sure it was the very best way to catch her brother.”

“Birdie, hush. For shame ! I will not allow this ; it is most disrespectful.”

“Fiddle-sticks, mamma ! It is the downright plain truth ; and you may just as well call a spade a spade, instead of pretending to talk of your dear cousin, Mrs. Dimity, that you never even saw or cared to see,” burst out the infuriated girl again, who

was plainly neither to "hand nor to bind" in her present excitement.

Daisy had turned at the very first; but as she had all the stairs to re-ascend softly, and that Birdie talked very fast and loud, she could not help overhearing so far—and this much more at the last.

"And now he has deserted me for that horrid Miss Goodchild that you brought here—another of your clever ideas! And Miss Dimity has just been working heaven and earth to take away Smiler Lee from us; and even trying for Captain Gascoigne so hard that he has run away to be rid of her."

The door of Daisy's room upstairs closed with a click, and a very dismayed little girl stood in the middle of the floor. If Birdie had only given her "rather a turn" before, she had given her a most decided one now.

This was dreadful!—to be living on the Coxes' hospitality while their daughter could say such unkind, false words of the guest; to be obliged by politeness to talk to her as if nothing had happened, perhaps to smile—worst of all, to receive her kisses! For that very morning Birdie had given her sweet Daisy ever so many caresses on either cheek before breakfast, by way of an appetising exercise, it seemed; and had smiled on her most brilliantly! It was all too horrible.

Daisy felt as if she must leave the house that minute.

Her gorge rose at the idea of eating the bread of people who all the time plainly wished her gone—grudged her the liking of any one of her brother's friends, and put such coarse interpretation on her innocent pleasure in their society.

It was a house of tears truly at that

moment, for downstairs Birdie had ended by forcing herself into hysterics ; and the mother's eyes had had tears not far from them all morning.

Daisy began to cry "a wee." What she complained of was that she felt so *hurt*; having truly tried to like all these people, even Birdie, and to think well of them, and not let Jack or Mr. Lee laugh at them. And then—then, too, she had so longed to wait for the great ball—and till Captain Gascoigne should come back !

But soon Daisy's tears, being very soft, melted the feelings of first anger out of her. Second thoughts came ; and she remembered that Mrs. Cox had evidently praised her ; that Fuzzy was undoubtedly fond of her—while Pussy's feelings, if indifferent, were not altogether unfriendly, for she had graciously intimated that she wished her future visit to Elm Hall to be

considered as fixed for the hunt ball—the one great ball of the year, to which Daisy and Polly had been taught to look forward, from the days of their short frocks, as shedding mild rapture upon all the remaining three hundred and sixty-five days of the year in that privileged region.

No!—for their feelings' sake it would be ill-tempered, perhaps under-bred, to pack her box now, and be off in a huff. But there were yet two days before the ball; two long dreary days to be existed through without seeing (Gerald) Gascoigne. If it had not been for the hope of hearing her beloved Jack's cheery accents on one day at least—on the other, duty, that odious word in the military meaning, would detain him—Daisy felt so heart-sick with the annoyance of Birdie's revelation, and all the previous minor vexations she had undergone from jealousy and gossip in this new

society, that she would have almost been glad to flee to dear Elm Hall that very day, and hear the squire's loud, glad greeting, and take refuge in Polly's young but sheltering arms.

She was aware, too, of secret fears she dared not face that Fuzzy's fate might, alas! be only a foreshadowing of her own.

Anyhow, Daisy rose up determined that she would gently hint that her visit had been unduly prolonged by waiting for Jack's regiment's ball. If this was negatived, and she was begged by the most of the family to wait for it—as proved to be the case that evening—then she was nevertheless determined that the very next morning she must say good-bye.

CHAPTER V.

“Neobùle, wing’d Love has flown off with thy spindles and basket of wools !

And thy studious delight in the toils of Minerva is chased from thy heart

By young Hebrus, the bright Liparean.”

DAISY felt calmer, and slipped out to pay the Miss Silverthornes a visit.

How peaceful and happy the very cat looked, lazily sauntering among its preserves of a yard of privet hedge and three well-clipped bushes approaching the entrance of Lilac Lodge. It was only one pebble’s throw distant from that of Magdala Villa.

How Fido, snow-white and cross from

his bath, yet deigned to rub himself dryer a moment against his late preserver in the tiny hall.

And in the drawing-room what a glad twitter broke from the little old ladies as their visitor came in ; and this day, instead of lavender, a scent of dried rose-leaves seemed hovering round the old-fashioned furniture and embroidery, the Corydons and Phyllises on screens and cushions, or of Chelsea china ; all that suggested having been lived with and loved by refined gentlewomen. It was all so home-like, dainty, and fragrant, after the painful newness of the Magdala furniture—with its tables bare of books, magazines, work-boxes, or any of that pleasant, useful litter which proves that the inmates of a reception-room use their brains as well as their fingers, and do not think of passing most of their time and of hiding their work in an untidy den.

After some friendly opening chat, Daisy, with blushing face, lightly let fall how short her probable stay in Marstown must be.

“I might even go before THE BALL,” she ended, in a small, quiet voice.

“Go before the ball!” The spinsters raised their hands and eyes.

Then Miss Prudence briskly said,

“Child, what is the matter? Are the other girls in there grown jealous of you?”

“It does not do to outstay one’s welcome, you know,” quoth poor Daisy, evasively.

“True,” murmured Miss Patience, “as King Solomon says in his proverb, ‘Withdraw thy foot from thy neighbour’s house; lest he be weary of thee, and so hate thee.’”

The elder Miss Silverthorne had begun knitting briskly at a white silk garter, and asked, with an air of rather suspicious indifference,

“By the way, Gerald Gascoigne is away

still. When does he come back, I wonder?"

"He told me he hoped to come back the night of their ball—if possible; but he had been asked to do some business for other people, so he would not like to hurry over it," answered Daisy, falling into the innocent trap.

"Ah!—oh!—yes; just like dear Gerald—Gerald Gascoigne. So very probably he won't be back for it," observed Miss Patience, with an air of equally suspicious indifference to that displayed by her sister, and she began beading a red silk purse, such as our great-grandmamas used, in a pattern of pink strawberries.

Somehow Daisy had expected, in an undefined way, more sympathy here. She kept back with pains a bitterness of gall from rising in her heart, but felt alone in a strange land. After all their kindness of speech before, after their liking Captain

Gascoigne so much, as they said—surely they might mutely understand how hard it seemed to go away, and lose the last chance of seeing him once more!

She tried to force a little chatter, though her heart was thus heavy laden.

“Yesterday *you* were knitting the silk garter, and Miss Silverthorne was beading the purse—why have you changed your work?”

“We always exchange our work each day, my dear; it makes us feel more united. Neither of us likes to do anything in which the other has not an equal share. I shall knit again to-morrow,” blandly replied Miss Patience, but with an abstracted air, as if she was not thinking much of her little guest at all.

Daisy, still more crestfallen, turned to Miss Prudence.

“Do you know, at first I was quite puz-

zled to know the difference between you, you are both so very much alike," she said, with some feeble guile ; for the old ladies were very proud if anyone was misled by their great similarity, which they also tried to keep up in dress and various other little ways. "One day," went on Daisy, "I remarked that your mittens had black bars at the back, but Miss Prudence's had feather-stitch, so I thought that would help me—only next time I was terribly puzzled, for it seemed to me that——"

"That we had changed our mittens ; exactly ! and so we had," blandly replied Miss Prudence, with a tone of equal want of interest in the subject to that lately shown by her sister. "In a few such articles of dress, my dear, when we cannot get them exactly alike, we make it a point always to wear them turn about. It makes us seem more united in such

little outward matters, as we are, I hope, in mind and affection. So one day you may see me wearing our black Brussels veil, with the rose-pattern, and the next day I shall wear the one with the sprig while Patience puts on the rose-pattern. It is the handsomest."

Her voice died off in an abstracted manner.

Daisy's conversation was utterly flagging. She gazed out of the window, feeling very sore at heart, and tried to say, blithely, in a small voice,

"I am afraid I must say good-bye.—It will be good-bye for a long time, too, won't it? for nothing is likely ever to bring me back to Marstown when Jack's regiment goes soon. And you are hardly more likely to come near Elm Hall, are you? although I do *wish* you would—And many, many thanks now for all your kindness to me."

“Don’t rise, my dear. Sit down ;—now do sit down again for a moment,” said Miss Prudence, in a rather agitated voice, settling her spectacles. Then she looked at her sister, whose own spectacles had been perfectly straight, but who, in an equally agitated manner, immediately touched them, and so set hers slightly crooked. “My dear ! we both feel and have said to each other that all the kindness is on your side, in saving Fido’s dear little life ; and then in coming here, reviving us, as it were, with your youth and bright face, like spring-time and gladness—”

“—And primroses, and birds, and green leaves,” put in Miss Patience.

“—And memories of our dear old home.” Then Miss Silverthorne again looked across and said, “Sister—I wonder if we are thinking of the same thing?”

“Sister, I am sure we are.”

“I was wondering if this bright little Daisy would care to spend a few days here in this quiet old-fashioned house.”

“So was I—just as a treat to two old-fashioned old maids, who like something young and pretty to look at and warm their hearts with.”

“Yes ; and, though it would be dull for her, we could ask her brother here as often as she liked,” ended the one old human love-bird, in a twitter of kindliness.

“And dear Gerald Gascoigne—for we have known him since a boy,” ended the other aged love-bird, in a flutter of pleased anticipation.

The tears came quite up into Daisy’s big forget-me-not eyes, making them dewily bright as they laughed ; though her happy mouth was still silent. The sweet red blood flew to her cheeks, so that instead of Wordsworth’s pale

“ Nun demure, of lowly port,”

who had entered Lilac Lodge, it was Burns’s daisy, a

“ Crimson-tipped flower,”

who cried out, with all the gladness of drooping hopes reviving,

“ You are the two very kindest people in the whole world. Oh ! dear, how can I ever thank you enough ? Oh ! dear me, what shall I say ?”

“ Say yes,” cried both the little old ladies, laughing heartily, but in a gentle, old-fashioned way. They did not laugh in convulsions, like some old people, who seem so to have forgotten mirth that it comes, poor souls ! rather awkwardly to them ; or, like others, in a heartless tone, as if all the inner kernel of it was dead, and the flavour a past thing ; but they laughed still with their whole hearts, but

softly, as if time had mellowed their merri-
ment, taking away only the first youthful
heat and strength, and leaving it clear and
cheering as good wine.

CHAPTER VI.

“ ‘Bless us!’ cried the Mayor, ‘what’s that?’
With the Corporation as he sat,
Looking little though wondrous fat;
Nor brighter was his eye, nor moister,
Than a too-long-opened oyster.”

IT was the afternoon before the great ball; the ball of Jack’s regiment; it was also (whisper this in a lower key) the day of Captain Gerald Gascoigne’s return, for had he not written to Jack Dimity that he hoped to be back just in time to dress and go to it?

How Daisy had felt glad as each hour lessened, and the time drew nearer.

It was the dinner-hour, in the middle of

the day, at Magdala Villa ; and the little doctor, who had just returned from two days' absence, was whetting his scythe, that is to say sharpening a carving-knife, in an ear-splitting fashion, whilst standing up before a huge coarse joint.

“ And how has the world wagged with you all since I have been away ? Has any young gentleman proposed for any of you girls ? ” he cried, whilst helping some of his family to wedges, others to hunches of meat, as rapidly as could possibly be ; with an eye on some delicate fat for himself, and much more thinly appetising slices. The doctor's joke fell flat : there was no fervent response in the feminine faces around the table. “ And how is our charming Miss Dimity ? ” he went on, looking all around ; then giving Daisy a most benignant gleam over his spectacles, reminding her, as when first she came, of a

frog about to bless her. "So she is going to leave us to-morrow, and all Marstown and the beaus will be sorrowing. Going back unscathed to her native wilds, like a comet that has shed desolation in its path, leaving broken hearts and ruined hopes behind her, and looking just as she should look, as fresh as a daisy! Eh? What's that you say, my dear Mrs. Cox?"

"The Miss Silverthornes have asked her to stay on a few days at Lilac Lodge," interposed his wife, with a voice as soft as fresh-pressed oil of almonds (Daisy wondered why she made it so very particularly soft). "And the Miss Silverthornes called here yesterday, my dear; you will be glad to hear."

"What—eh—what; *confound* this knife! WHAT in the name of goodness do you mean by giving me such a knife?" and the little doctor glared fiercely upon the

servant, and spluttered and muttered as if everyone but himself was responsible for the knives being cold iron instead of best steel, till Daisy secretly thought his manners had not improved; while a faint red tinged his wife's faded cheeks. "So they did themselves the honour to call on us, did they? Well, I suppose since Miss Dimity has scraped acquaintance with them—I beg her pardon, they with her, I should say—that you had better return their call, my dear."

This was very good, considering that to make the old ladies' acquaintance was well known by all his household to have long been a deep desire of the little doctor's heart; and even that he had set several devices on foot to accomplish this, all of which had signally failed. He was plainly seen to be in a disturbed state of mind, though only the

home-pilot of his temper, his wife, had foreseen any storm brewing.

“And so you are going to visit those old cats, Miss Dimity? Well, well; I *hope* you’ll like it,” with a would-be cheeriness of tone suggesting that such an event was sadly unlikely. “How long do you stay; though, indeed, very likely being a young lady of a practical turn of mind, you will not leave Marstown now you know its advantages till you have settled yourself for future life. Eh, come now! ha, ha; is that to be the way of it?”

“I only intend to stay a few days with the Miss Silverthornes,” replied Daisy, with all the milk of human kindness in her mind frozen into surprised dignity; while her eyes looked at the doctor much as might little Red Riding-hood’s at the wolf in grandmamma’s bed.

“And I am to go back with her to Elm

Hall; so it is a very good thing for me she is staying on a little longer, because my dresses could never have been got ready in time," burst in Fuzzy, red-hot at this juncture, and determined to protect her friend, if she should have to fight for it; though Mrs. Cox only looked politely miserable.

She could fight the little doctor for her own brood's sake, with outspread wings at times, but the spirit within her was too crushed by the daily weight of her life's small burdens to rise on behalf of a stranger's child. Yet she nervously kept pressing the salt upon Daisy three times in her anxiety to atone for the doctor's incivility; and surreptitiously poured out another half-glass of Marsala with such an imploring smile that Daisy, though reluctant, would have swallowed poison rather than have grieved her by refusing it.

Dr. Cox's thunderous state became apparently lightened and brightened by either Daisy's or Fuzzy's answers ; possibly by both.

“ Very civil, very civil, I'm sure, of Mr. and Mrs. Dimity to ask you to Elm Hall, my child,” he observed, in a grumbling, gratified tone, ignoring Daisy's share in the matter ; then, with a sort of gruff jocular-ity, added, “ Not, I should suppose, from all accounts, that you will find any gay young sparks you will be wanting to run away with down there. However, none of your young lady friends here will be likely to know that ; and they will all be dying of envy, according to the charming weakness of your sex, when you write to them from Elm Hall. That's what I always do, when I go out into the country to any swell house. The last time I went to see Lady de Hautenbas' children for measles,

I wrote several notes on her coroneted paper, and it quite imposed on everybody—ha, ha, ha !”

None of his hearers responded very warmly, though Pussy and her mother called up feeble smiles. But the doctor cared very little for the opinion of his own womankind, and had apparently grown tired of treating Daisy with the humbug of deference he had first shown to the guest. So he started away on the same topic.

“Elm Hall would not do for our friend Smeeth. He travelled down with me in the train to-day, and the poor old boy was talking to me about his daughters—he ! he ! he !—consulting me, in fact, about their chances of marrying in Marstown. ‘Did I think, now, that Boulogne, or some of those cheap watering-places in summer-time, would be better for getting *rid of them*?’ Lord ! how I laughed in my sleeve !

Getting rid of them ! If that's not a capital story for me to go round with at the ball to-night, my name's not Jeremy Cox."

"Oh ! my dear, don't," softly urged Mrs. Cox, in a tone of very real distress. "It would not be kind. Poor Colonel Smeeth may be very silly in saying such things ; but it only means that he is a very devoted father, and really anxious for his girls."

"Not kind ? Trash !—stuff, my dear ! I'll be bound it will be the only time that he ever amused people before. You are too good-natured, and therefore you let yourself be imposed upon. It is the duty of everyone to try to be amusing in society, and make themselves agreeable, unless they are in the bosom of their own family."

And the little doctor, who seemed determined to show himself at his worst, gave, it seemed to Daisy, a covert glance at her.

self, who had indeed sat singularly silenced during this meal.

“As to caring for his daughters, there is only one of mine who seems to care for me—or who could take the trouble of *writing* to me all that was going on here whilst I was away.”

He turned a red expanse of displeased bald brow first upon Fuzzy, then upon Pussy, whose healthy, rosy faces seemed to care very little for his displeasure, however. They knew his bark was worse than his bite ; for he was really an over-indulgent father in some ways, and, if cross at times with the elder girls, spoiled Birdie utterly. Also, they had grown too much accustomed to hear him talk humbug to other ladies, and to know how he contradicted himself in private, to be very filially sensitive as to his criticisms.

But they both immediately turned and

transfixed Birdie with a reproachful, steady gaze. The latter under this treatment grew traitorously red.

“My child, did you write to your father?” asked Mrs. Cox, in a tone of quiet surprise, as if she knew there was more in this than met the eye. “Why, I asked if you would enclose a line when I was writing to him, and you refused.”

“Yes, I did. I didn’t choose to write like that. I liked to write to him in my own way,” answered Birdie, defiantly, now raising her head again.

“And she told me much more gossip and news than you did, my dear. Yours was only full of the cook’s having given warning, and the chances of the boys taking whooping-cough at school. Birdie, I think I must give you a silver bangle for being so dutiful,” answered the doctor, with a protecting look at his youngest daughter.

“I think we have all had enough,” said Mrs. Cox, rising; and putting her arm round Daisy’s waist, she swept out of the room with dignity, although she had on her oldest gown of rusty black alpaca. She had assumed again, too, all the sweetness of manner Daisy had remarked on their very first meeting—only now the latter indescribably knew it was more real.

Pussy and Fuzzy followed with their heads also high, and rare indignation in their hearts, leaving the doctor and Birdie together.

They signalled to Daisy to come upstairs, and shut themselves into her bed-room, where Mrs. Cox, meekly knowing they went to talk rebellion, would not follow them.

“Silver bangles, indeed! That is what some people get by telling tales,” uttered Pussy, with soft viciousness.

"I don't understand what is the matter!" said Daisy, perplexed.

"No wonder," ejaculated Fuzzy, in a rage. "Birdie has, as usual, stolen a march upon us all. She has written to papa that she is unhappy, and is longing for him to come back and protect her from being snubbed by us all, I daresay."

"The fact is, none of her gentlemen friends could stand her temper lately, so they have all deserted her," went on Pussy, with rather pleased malice. "So she is deadly jealous of you, darling; such nonsense, for Smiler Lee never even *thought* of her! and she thinks you have turned your brother from her, too."

"Indeed, no. But—but Jack, I think, never really liked her better than—than either of you," said poor Daisy, inclined to cry at all this happening on the last day of her visit.

“Of course not—I always thought so,” exclaimed Pussy, triumphant.

“You never should have annoyed her, Pussy, by speaking about it,” cried Fuzzy, kissing her friend; and then came a knock at the door, and Mrs. Cox’s gentle voice—no doubt she had bethought herself, it was better to prevent their anger fermenting.

She had come wishing to see Daisy’s ball-dress, she said. All girls know what a flattering request that is; so out Daisy eagerly pulled Madame Furbelow’s wonder and glory of creamy, lustrous, satin cob-web-lace, and ghostly thin tulle.

An outcry of astonished admiration followed. None of them had ever seen it before; for Daisy was reticent about her superior possessions. They put it on the famous rejected dummy figure, which was transformed at once from Aunt Sally to

Venus; they coveted, admired, thought how to copy it; almost worshipped it. Daisy glowed again with pleasure, quite feeling that, while half their praises were honestly meant for the dress, the rest were meant in atoning warmth and kindness to herself. Sweet is adversity, if it teaches us to know our friends from our backbiters, thought Daisy—which is very well and noble in theory, but perhaps some of us would rather do without the friends than have them with the sauce of adversity.

“But what ornaments are you going to wear with it, my love?” inquired Mrs. Cox, full of consoling generosity. “What! only a string of pearls; no colour? Dear me, I wonder is there anything of mine I could lend you for the night” (reflectively). “Birdie has borrowed my red coral strings, and I have lent Pussy my ivory necklace—it has very handsome pendants, and

there is the bog oak one, only, left for you, Fuzzy dear. But," with returning animation, "I could lend Daisy my LARGE gold brooch." This was an ornament of bright gold, about the size of a young warming-pan; at the bare proposal of which Daisy shuddered. "I generally wear it myself for night parties; but I can manage instead with the miniature of General Cox, the doctor's father, that you have seen me wearing of an afternoon." (Yes, indeed! every afternoon.) "What need appearances matter for an old woman!"

In the outburst of her benevolence Mrs. Cox was hastening off to fetch the glorious breast-plate, when Fuzzy interposed.

"Nonsense, mamma; it would make Daisy look like a young Zulu chieftainess. It is very handsome for you," with inward dubiousness; "but it would simply spoil her appearance."

“ Ah, well ! perhaps so. But that brooch is made of the very best yellow gold ; it was sent me by my poor dear brother from Australia,” ended Mrs. Cox, evidently rather glad not to part with her treasure in spite of her goodness of heart, whilst Daisy silently blessed Fuzzy for delivering her from this terrible golden shield.

“ How dismal the room looks with your boxes packed up !” they all exclaimed. “ Why did you pack them to-day, Daisy ?”

“ Because the Miss Silverthornes asked me to have my heavy luggage carried in to Lilac Lodge this evening, for they happened to have *a man* at work to-day on the premises !”

“ Well ; and a very good reason too. We know what it is to have only maids in the house,” seriously replied Mrs. Cox, as Daisy smiled.

Neither of them could foresee, however,

that Daisy would be rather glad that there had been a man that night to carry her boxes out of Magdala Villa.

CHAPTER VII.

“And oh! she dances such a way,
No sun upon an Easter day
Is half so fine a sight.”

THE great ball was held in the Town-hall.

Such a string of carriages as were before it that night had not been seen in the memory of young Marstown; and no one listened to the “I remembers” of the old about some primæval yeomanry ball or other. Such eager crowds as peeped and pressed round the doorway; such glitter and gleam of swords, flags, and bayonets, in decorations up the grand stairs, and in

the great brilliantly-lit ball-room; such hundreds of mirrors, and draped muslin curtains in all conceivable places; such nestling sofas in all *inconceivable* nooks; such banks of moss, beds of roses, glow of uniforms, and full-blown fashion in dresses—such a ball, in fact, had never been known in Marstown.

The male guests could be heard observing to each other, in audible asides,

“ Oh! come; I say, they *have* done it this time—haven’t they?”

The ladies murmured,

“ Isn’t it *too* delightful!”

The Cox party now entered the ball-room; the little fat doctor first, with his wife’s arm tucked tight under his elbow—since she could not persuade him that this was no longer the fashion—she herself, a full head and shoulders higher, moving with faded grace at his side.

“He seems clutching his claims to gentility,” whispered Jack Dimity.

The Cox girls were in pink, blue, and crimson ; whilst Daisy floated among them like a small white cloud, above which was a bewildered little face, that after scarcely seeing Colonel Dunn and Mrs. Luxton, who received them, till Fuzzy gently touched her, tried to descry Jack’s face—and one other—among the group of officers further on.

“Here I am, little one,” growled the beloved brotherly voice in her ear. “Jiminy ! you do look stunning, though ! How much do you cost an inch to-night ? My stars and garters ! you look so nice, I think I must give you an extra dance.”

“Well, I never !—to speak like that to the belle of the ball-room !” put in Smiler Lee, who had eagerly rushed up. “Miss Dimity, give me some dances, do ; before

all the rest of the men in the room hustle me off. Five of them fell backward with admiration when you sailed into the room like *Auror-er* What-d'ye-call-her ! and the others are rushing about frantically, asking to be introduced. Upon my word I'm not chaffing ; a dozen asked me your name. I said I didn't know, but I'd try to find out—ho ! ho ! ho ! They'll murder me !—here they come.”

A respectable regiment of suitors was indeed seen advancing upon Daisy, their modestly-halting footsteps led by “the two quiet men,” Gascoigne's friends in the regiment, who did not personally know Daisy, as they never went into society, but had nevertheless been pounced on as the least self-interested and occupied of the stewards by the eager admirers.

The Smiler now frantically implored for six dances, that, when shot in a duel for

Daisy's sake next morning, he might die happy. But no arguments would make that snowily-frigid young goddess grant more than two, though he hopped about before her in agony. Even when the crowd of worshipping swains stood around, she carefully studied her card, and doled out their awarded dances in condescendingly gracious niggardliness; whilst she gloated anxiously over some blank spaces on her card, and her troubled blue eyes wandered past all the pressing faces, searching the crowded room—in vain!

“Circe and the beasts,” murmured the Smiler, who believed he had an apt trick of classical quotations.

Jack drew his handkerchief from the sleeve of his scarlet tunic, up which it was stuffed, with difficulty—the army regulations apparently not considering it necessary that a gentleman should ever want to

use it—and subsided behind this into a pæan of mirthful rejoicing over the triumph of the eldest daughter of the Dimities !

The herd of stricken deer moved off with inward, mutual anger and self-distrust, each one believing his chances had been spoiled by the other. The “two quiet men” marched away with an air of bright relief, as feeling, though they did not mean to dance, no one could now say they had not done their duty towards forwarding the wants and wishes of the regiment’s guests ; and now they both might soon with safe consciences slip off together to smoke, and then show themselves again for supper—before melting away like two drops out of the crowd and returning to peace in the barrack-square, and bed.

“Jack dear, I have kept this first dance for you. Dance it with me, do ; I want to talk with you,” implored his sister.

“Can’t, my child. It’s a quadrille, and so I’ve asked *Mrs. Cox* herself to open the ball with me;” and, if Jack did not give a wink at his sister, he suggested as much, implying that then the three Misses Cox could not pull each others’ hair about him.

“Well, then, the second,” looking about with a desperate eye, and relinquishing hoarded treasure number one, not seeing her Prince Perfect to claim it.

“I don’t mind that,” answered Jack, with sweet condescension.

The Smiler screwed his face up into a comical, silent whistle, meant to express for Daisy’s benefit—who did not care what he thought of her Jack’s fraternal behaviour,

“If *I* had a sister!”—

Still wonderingly Daisy’s eyes searched the room with its kaleidoscopic, ever-shift-

ing groups, and mazy quadrille figures, in vain, in vain looking for one tall figure and reddish-brown head! She found herself beginning the ball with a youth much smitten by her charms, the son of a great county baronet; but hardly knew with whom she was dancing, and certainly as little cared.

“Hallo, you did get a swell,” said Jack, coming up to quiz her when his turn came, but with a highly-gratified look. “Do you know that is the eldest son; he has just gone into the 2nd Life Guards. You are flying high to-night. At this rate, when Polly comes out, as she always wants to outdo you, you little simpleton, she’ll be trying for some old mummy of a duke, that her name may be embalmed for evermore in the peerage.”

“I did not know who he was,” said Daisy, absently gazing after her departing

partner. "He is very like a half-fledged young canary."

Then after a turn or two, during which Jack showed to the admiring gaze of the room how two Dimities could dance with infinite satisfaction—

"By the way, Jack, why is your friend, Captain Gascoigne, not here yet?"

"Because he never came back at all!"

A blank seemed to come upon the ball; a great sheet of blankness, as it were, on Daisy's mind, blotting out all the anticipated happiness of this night of nights!

Everything seemed a void, she herself felt hollow, as those only do who have lost all heart; what were these people all dancing for in such a mock-mirthful fashion? It seemed to her as if they could not be *really* enjoying themselves any more than herself; though of course the thoughtless

throng might believe that she was utterly gay, too, because her card was filled with names, that were the dearest sounding names in the world to her.

A long, long time seemed to have passed in that blank, when—and then really she knew it to be only a minute or two later—Jack grumpily uttered, in a disgusted tone,

“I do think it is too bad of old Gascoigne. He told me he was certain to come back for *our* ball! Anyhow he can’t stay longer than to-morrow; his leave is up then, so he might as well have made a struggle and come back for to-night.”

He must come back to-morrow!

As the sun in April’s strange scene-shiftings will suddenly peer out from behind a rain-cloud, and unexpectedly flood the landscape with light, beauty, gladness, and the outbursting melody of birds, so was it in Daisy’s spring-like heart. Begone,

dull care! Why be sad any longer, for *he must come back to-morrow.*

Life is short, grief is long; why grieve five minutes longer than we need?—remember he will be here again to-morrow.

Much as the clock ticks, so the heart thinks—to this side, to that side—gladness! sorrow!

Clang! clash! clir-r-r! Another dance had begun, but Daisy felt gayer than a few seconds ago would have seemed possible. The rebound of relief after the first blow had been all the greater compared with that first blankness of desolation. Now all her thought and vague hopes were no longer centred on to-night, but on to-morrow.

“Ah! demain, c’est la grande chose!

De quoi demain sera-t’il fait?

L’homme aujourd’hui sème la cause,

Demain Dieu fait mûrir l’effet.”

Does this verse seem too grand to be

connected with the simple love and disappointment of a homely little country-maiden, an “unassuming common-place of Nature”?

But, after all, most of us are common-place; and many, after just such a night of light-footed waltzing as Daisy’s, may have solemn enough morrows. She did plainly right now in trying her best to be cheerful and pleasing again, so that her next partners thought her as bright a little cricket as ever they had met. With curious logic, she even told herself it was perhaps just as well Captain Gascoigne had not come for the great ball, since Jack would have been quite vexed if she had not made herself agreeable to all his friends.

And—she *could* not, had Gascoigne been there!

She could not have helped watching him, when possible, and thinking of him

the whole time; wondering what he could be saying to other people, and what he would say to herself.

So now she watched the door no more, but gave herself up to enjoying the ball as heartily, but not as ecstatically, as those do who have no all-engrossing idea.

“Glorious, isn’t it?” panted the Smiler, as he and Daisy flew down the great room, in a polka, like harmless lightning; zig-zagging hither and thither at tremendous speed, but with all his energies at frightful tension to avoid that terrible disgrace of bumping other couples. “I say—between ourselves, you know—don’t you think they’ll talk of this ball of ours in Marstown for many a long day?”

Daisy was sure of it.

“And I hear you worked the hardest of all about it yourself.”

“Work! I believe you. Now, do I look

as if I had never been in bed at all last night ; no ?—it's a fact, though. Couldn't sleep knowing they were washing the floor here, and then the wretches might have ruined us by putting on too much chalk, so I came down every hour to see how they were getting on. For you see I had undertaken to see about it, and when once *I* say that, I'm not a man to go to sleep over a thing. I suppose the world would say it was very foolish ; come, what do you think ?”

“Very foolish,” echoed Daisy, in an absent tone, hardly understanding a word of all his little—justly-earned—self-tribute of praise. Lee stopped, and held by the tip of one of his well-waxed moustaches in his surprise ; then a good-humoured smile broke over his face despite feeling snubbed. His eyes had followed the track of Daisy's, and had seen—

“Why! there is Gascoigne arrived, after all,” he exclaimed, looking where a welcoming group stood around the better-late-than-never new-comer, evidently listening with interest and questioning to some unusual explanation he was giving. “Let us go over there, and hear what kept him.

(This was, indeed, good-fellowship towards his comrade, since we all know it is often so hard for men to tell: What some women *can* see in other men!)

As they approached, Daisy now hesitating very much, and rather wishing she were in the background, Gascoigne came to meet them, with rather eager eyes, but a quietly self-possessed step.

“Well, Miss Dimity, you promised me two dances at our ball—I hope you have kept them.”

“Why—it is nearly all over! How

could one know you were really coming."

Daisy's eyes opened wide, bewildered by his calm claim, which at once put her in the wrong; bitterly disappointed to think of the so long hoarded dances for him, so lately given to any poor stop-gap of an applicant.

"I said I was coming, if it were at all possible," and Gascoigne looked back at her, with a steady eye that sent secret reproach into Daisy's inmost soul.

She had meant to be so loyal, and now seemed to have been disloyal. Her mind was so completely given up to him that her conscience, which really ought to have been blameless, began perplexedly to feel that she must have treated him very badly indeed. But she could only look down at her card, and then look up at him blankly, without finding a word to say in self-excuse.

“ Oh, well—no luck for me, I see, to-night. Can’t be helped. It was not my fault that I came late, though.” And Gerald drew himself up to his tallest height, with a smile that was rather hurt, and a shrug that was thoroughly gentlemanlike; and both would have reduced Daisy to further despair, but that she heard Jack’s blessed bassoon in her ear,

“ I say! why can’t you give him my other dance, and let me make some other young woman happy? It’s not such a Sunday-come-once-a-fortnight treat for you and me to dance together. And, look here ” (to Gascoigne), “ what did happen? Did you miss your train, or have a smash on the line?”

“ No,” replied Gascoigne, in his slow, soft voice. “ But I was so delayed by some business that I could not catch the mail to come down here; and all I could

do was to get on a goods train as far as Sleepyvale, and then take the old-fashioned coach."

"Good man!"

"Well, I'd rather it was you than me. I know that old coach breaks down three times a week."

"Yes, but then he wanted to be in time for OUR BALL," exclaimed the by-standers.

"The coach did break down," went on Gascoigne, calmly. "We had only gone three miles when the axle-tree broke coming down a hill, and we were sent flying eighteen feet over a hedge. Luckily only one man's shoulder was put out. The inside passengers were more frightened than hurt, but they were all in a pigeon pie on the top of each other. You never saw such a squash."

"And how did you get back?" asked everyone. "Not on foot? Impossible!"

“Every step of the way,” smiled Gascoigne. “Young de Hautenbas was driving by, and offered me a lift in his dog-cart just then, but I had lost two valuable things in the scrimmage, a book and a—a flower; and would not stir an inch till they were found.”

“A book!—a flower!” jibed Lee and Jack alternately, in astonishment. “Could you not get another book at Mudie’s? And a flower at Covent Garden? Blessed if we should have refused a lift for either!”

“It was not an ordinary flower. It was a valuable—well, *plant*, that I was bringing down for a lady,” evasively answered Gascoigne, with an air of regret. (Daisy’s eyes, half-raised to peep from under their modest eyelashes in a twinkle of jealousy, met his eyes unexpectedly looking fully at her face. She felt ashamed of her momentary pang.) He went on: “Unfortu-

nately, though I stormed and searched it never was found, although the book was. It was a family thing."

"What—the flower or the book?" laughed Jack.

"Oh! the book," answered Gascoigne, but in a confused way, still eyeing Daisy. "My old uncle is a bit of a bibliographer, and, as thanks for some business I did for him, he gave me an Aldine Virgil, the rare edition of 1501, too."

"What! a genuine Aldo Manuzio! Oh! where did you find it again?" cried Una Goodchild, excitedly, who was on Jack's arm.

"I found it tucked tight under an old lady's shawl. She was hysterically convinced it was her family Bible."

"Was it worth the walk you had?" irreverently asked Lee and Dimity.

"Oh! it must have been worth *any*

trouble," uttered Una, at the same moment.

The trio immediately began a triangular battle of books. But Daisy seized this first chance of speaking to Gascoigne unregarded, to murmur softly and shyly, as he bent down his ear to hear what she said so low,

"And have you—have you had no dinner?"

Gascoigne nearly laughed outright as he smiled down upon her—but not quite. She might have been hurt, and he was a gentleman. But he was charmed with her question, being a man, and the tenderly-engaging small anxiety with which it was put. He understood so well the solicitude for him which prompted it, and the sweet, homely nature that looked upon taking thought for the comfort of her friends as her especial duty.

As she blushed under his keen gaze, he

said in a tone of hearty re-assurance that —(for her dear sake !)—he would not starve just yet.

“ It does not matter. I was *determined* to come to the ball ; and there will be time for some supper before our dance together comes.”

And away he went, at Daisy’s suggestion—but why should he have turned off so immediately ?—that was so vexingly like a man ! and soon, gazing from afar, she saw him in the fairy grotto of a supper-room, sitting at a tiny mushroom-like table, with his two “quiet” friends, all three laughing, eating plovers’ eggs, and quaffing dry champagne, as if the great ball had lost all its horrors for *them*, its sweet romance for *him*.

Daisy felt it would have been quite impossible to her to eat anything, after the intoxicating happiness of seeing him again.

CHAPTER VIII.

“Now sleeps the crimson petal, near the white ;
 Nor waves the cypress in the palace walk ;
 Nor winks the gold fin in the porphyry font :
 The fire-fly wakens ; waken thou with me.”

IT was the sweetest little bower ever
 whispered in, where they two sat.

Tall, palm-like shrubs met overhead in
 scented semi-darkness, white roses glim-
 mered, crimson passion-flowers glowed in
 the warm gloom. A tiny fountain played
 beside them, its tinkling drops falling on
 their bewitched hearing like “tiny silver
 bells upon the robes of hovering silence.”
 Gold-fish darted in and out among the

water-lilies in the basin. They saw it all, but only looked at each other; and only seemed to hear the unspoken thoughts they interchanged.

Their one thrilling dance was over, and Gascoigne had led away his little partner here, pressing her arm a little closer than usual to his side, looking down at her twice with a proud, pleased look, as if she already belonged to him: while she—earth did not seem earth, but paradise, in which they two only now sat and looked in each other's eyes and said—very little. Then Gascoigne spoke,

“So you are not leaving us yet awhile, after all. I am so glad—I hurried back here fearing you would be gone to-morrow?”

“But I am so sorry you should have hurried back on my account.” This was uttered in a small voice, shy as small.

Gascoigne smiled upon her, so that she bent down a modest brown head, hiding her face like her namesake at night, and only showing a warm tinged cheek.

It is such sweet dalliance, he thinks to himself, he will not say just yet—not just yet—the words that he came back meaning to say, and that are even now on his tongue. Some inward start of maiden shyness makes her hurriedly speak and break the silence, and why! she hardly knows, nor what she is saying.

“You have not admired my dress; is it not pretty?—tell me,” with a pigmy attempt at defiance of their mutual strange shyness.

Gascoigne rather sentimentally utters.

“‘In gloss of satin and glimmer of pearl.’—You could not look nicer even in a common print frock, as I saw you that first afternoon—do you remember? But the

‘queen lily and rose’ hardly apply to *you*,” in a tone of fond appraising. “How I do wish I had not lost that flower this evening—!”

“Can you not be happy without thinking of a stupid plant?” burst from little Daisy, almost unawares, so suddenly had he dropped a spark upon what modicum of fiery spirit she possessed. “I beg your pardon; indeed, I do; but surely you might forget it now with—with your friends.”

“I meant that flower for you, Miss Dimity.”

“For me—?”

“Yes, if you would have deigned to accept it. You might even have worn it to-night.—No, I forgot!—There would not have been time to have offered it beforehand.”

“Oh, but you might have sent it—just

to see if I would," coquettishly. "Why do you shake your head and laugh? What colour was it—white?"

"Well, upon my word I don't know that it was any colour at all—at least, it sometimes looked all colours."

"What an extraordinary flower! It has some horrible Latin name, of course, like *Robinsonii*, or——"

"Well, no. It has a very simple old English name, that means Day's Eye, I believe."

Daisy opened her own eyes rather wide at this. Gascoigne went on, laughing at her puzzled state,

"You remind me of what Wordsworth called your namesake,

‘A little Cyclops, with one eye,
Staring to threaten or defy.’

And if you had worn that great brooch of Mrs. Cox's you were telling me of just

now, he would have described you as

‘ A silver shield with boss of gold
That spreads itself, some fairy bold
In fight to cover.’

Yes; I certainly wish I had not lost my flower—my foreign daisy,” went on Gerald, with a man’s power of being able to regret, or feel glad of more tangible sublunary matters than love’s young dream, even in the very midst and rapture of its bewitchingly sweet spell. “When I left my old uncle’s Vicarage of Barleyfields this morning, I little thought——”

“Barleyfields—a vicarage! What is your uncle’s name?” ejaculated Daisy, with such an astonished look that Gascoigne, equally astonished, answered only,

“Brownrigg.”

“Oh! that is not the name. At least, I cannot quite remember what the name of *his* uncle was. There was some one I used

to know who used to talk to me of staying at Barleyfields—yes, at the vicarage.”

“Some one?—a ‘he,’ you said—a young man?” with growing surprise, just tinged with jealous suspicion.

“Well, yes—at least, I—I thought him quite a young man then—but you, perhaps,” hesitatingly, “might call him a boy.”

“Hardly likely. No, Miss Dimity, it is generally your sex who are so fond of using the term; and very often I am afraid it is supposed to excuse their flirtations with some very full-grown young men. They say, ‘Oh! he is only a boy—such a dear boy!’ However, your friend, you own, was a young man, and I give you credit for saying so. An admirer, I suppose?” and Gascoigne spoke with an assumption of righteous severity, quite unusual with him, against the sex; and an

undertone of dawning, unreasonable anger against the supposed admirer.

Daisy flushed crimson, as he could see even in the scented dusk caused by the tall plants round them, and she looked down shame-faced.

“I don’t know why you should say so—it is not very kind of you, I think” (in her nervousness being aware of his displeasure, and trying to defend herself meekly). “Of course he *liked* me; at least—he said he did.”

“Pray do not imagine I think it a *crime* that you should have an admirer;” then, with a rather doubting smile, “Only if this *he* happened to be one of the young Dicksons, my uncle’s other two nephews, I should hardly advise you to place too much confidence in the affections of such young men. I don’t wish to hurt your feelings——”

“No, no ; go on ; please say whatever you like.”

“Well, then ; it seems ungenerous to disparage them, as I am supposed to be their successful rival in my old uncle’s affections. (That seems hard, too, as he has no children, and I happen to be a little better off than they are !) But even if one of them has been fortunate enough to be beforehand with me in—in your good opinion, Miss Dimity, it is not a perhaps natural jealousy that makes me warn you . . . I mean,” speaking very earnestly, but stammering a good deal, “perhaps you do not know that my uncle has just been obliged to send Phil out to New Zealand, and that Theodore is—well, no one quite knows where just at present. *Did* you hear that ?”

“I never heard of the two Mr. Dicksons before in my life, Captain Gascoigne.”

“WHAT! Oh! I see; you have been making game of me about them all this time while I was speaking.”

And, though he spoke very gently, Gerald became a fine red all over his face, that made his honest nose look delightfully ugly. Daisy eyed him sideways, and thought it was such a nice big nose, and was quite flattered that she could make her Sir Perfect almost in a rage—though sorry too. Still she pretended to answer, in such a soft huff as a lamb or a pigeon might show when properly offended.

“I beg your pardon, but I did not know what you were going to say. It was not my fault that you thought I meant either of your cousins. Dickson was not the name at all.”

“Not,” joyfully! “Why, then, whom can you mean? Not young Tabuteau—the doctor’s son, with the lame leg; or old

Ridley, the hunting squarson," (*i.e.*, squire and parson). "I know no one else there." Then, in remembering contrition, "But I am ashamed of myself. I was quite forgetting how very presuming it is to inquire into what a lady may not wish to tell. Please forgive me. Only——"

"Only what, Captain Gascoigne?"

"That, as he said he liked you—at which I am not at all surprised!—I should like to know"—(with a considerable effort)—"*whether you liked him equally well?*"

"Yes, indeed I did!" and up Daisy looked again in animated simplicity. "I was very fond of him."

"Fond of him; this gentleman?" asked Gascoigne, in a very subdued tone, she thought. "When a young lady says that, it might be taken to mean, Miss Dimity—excuse me if I should not ask the question, but—are you engaged to him?" His tone

was so full of meaning that Daisy blushed furiously. She put up her white, mysteriously-given fan, and put it down, and began twitching all her pretty ribbons straight; then she laughed.

“Oh, I—— oh, no! He did ask me certainly to marry him some time or other, and I said yes. But it was all nonsense.”

“All nonsense! When he asked you to marry him and you said yes?” uttered Gascoigne, sitting up straight and looking at her in indignation, astonishment, and almost scorn. “Miss Dimity, I did *not* think you were like so many young ladies of the present day, who seem to consider an engagement only binding when they can make no better. I did *not* think that you would have promised yourself to this unknown man, or any man, and then have said it was all nonsense.”

“But, indeed, Captain Gascoigne, it was ! for we were both so young.”

“And,” continued Gerald, mighty in his hurt wrath and great disappointment in this his supposed innocent field-flower ; unheeding her now imploring looks to listen to her story, her piteous, last small effort in self-defence,—“and I *did* think that, knowing you were engaged to this other man, you might have told me so—before now,” and up he rose straight, as if to go, seeming, in Daisy’s misty eyes, so grand and noble ! quite a king among the herd of common men—except that her sight was so dim and ever dimmer she could hardly see him again till two iris-hued tears had rolled slowly down. But, though Gascoigne had risen, Daisy did not rise. Instead she gasped,

“Captain Gascoigne——”

“Yes, Miss Dimity,” answered Gerald,

in a hard, frozen tone, with his head stiffly averted. "What is it?"

"Am I really engaged, because"—then slyly, as he turned in astonished doubt—"I don't think I really can be."

"You are *not*! And why—because you broke it off—?"

"Because I—I—don't laugh at me, please—I was only twelve years old!"

Gerald did not obey her for once. He looked at her baby-face still upturned beseechingly; at the two tears undried; and then went into a great laugh. After which, sitting down again beside her on the little sofa in the dim recess he laughed again, but very softly; and as much at himself as at her, apparently.

"Don't," said Daisy, twisting away her head with a very pretty turn of a dimpled shoulder, and a pout expressed as it were in her voice.

“Don’t what, Miss Daisy?”

“Don’t tease me—by laughing at me.”

“Very well; I won’t tease you any more, if you will only tell me whether—since you are not irretrievably engaged——”

Gascoigne paused an instant, as he was softly speaking; he and Daisy had somehow drawn nearer each other; the fountain gurgled laughingly in its cunningly contrived nook, among the palms that seemed whispering to each other of “vegetable loves,” as a little night-breeze swayed their fronds—and the dim white flowers massed around appeared to nod at their little, white, human sister in confiding encouragement. Daisy tried to look up, but could not, so looked down; her lips would fain have framed some soft expostulation, but could only quiver, as Gascoigne, pausing, looked in her face and put out his hand as if to take her little one. It was almost in

his grasp, as he still more tenderly repeated,

“Whether you could ever like me well enough——”

There came a rustle approaching, a cackling laugh, and a bald head peered past the screening boscage, exclaiming,

“What’s here? Anything nice going on here, eh? Anything good to be had? Why, bless my soul! I didn’t think it was . . . *It is* Captain Gascoigne and Miss Dimity!”

And Dr. Cox, coming more fully into view, stood and gazed upon the abashed couple; arranging his spectacles to examine their looks with the air of a friendly, family medicine-man, who had learnt from their pulse something was wrong, and who had known their constitution since birth.

His daughter Birdie hung upon his arm,

pretending to draw back with shyness, but looking malignant-eyed from under her eyelashes all the same.

“It absolutely is Miss Dimity and our friend Gascoigne!” repeated the worthy-looking old spoil-sport. “I said to my Birdie here, as she was not dancing, that we would just make a little tour of inspection round the pretty spooneries, as I call these charming spots, ha ! ha ! little thinking we should stumble on two such friends. What a cosy little party we make, eh? But perhaps there is no more room ; is there ?”

“Oh ! yes, certainly, Dr. Cox ; pray sit down,” uttered Gascoigne, with very forced politeness, wishing him at Magdala Villa with all his heart. “There is room enough for everyone.”

“But perhaps we are not wanted all the same, pa,” giggled Birdie, significantly,

pinching his arm. "Didn't I tell you so, when you began poking round?"

"What, bless my heart! but you said if any couples were spooning, my child. Do they want us to go, do you think . . . ? What, eh, not?" as rather unhappy gestures of dissent were forced from the inspected pair. "Now, now, Birdie, what am I to do between you"—for his playful daughter affectedly caught him by the coat-tails, as if to drag him away. "Come now, I'll just put it to themselves. My dear people, *were you spooning?*"

A scornful "No!" escaped from Gascoigne. Goodness forgive him the story! but if, as Sir Walter Scott declared, a fib is permissible on some occasions to screen one from impudent questions, surely to shield poor Daisy, who could not speak, was such an occasion. Besides, "spooning" is an unrefined verb, and scarcely expressed his feelings.

“There, there! I told you so, Birdie; I knew our friend Gascoigne would be glad to have us;” whereupon the doctor tucked up his coat-tails carefully, and plumped down in the vacant space on the other side of Gerald, whom he proceeded to interview upon the subject of his recent absence. Whilst Gascoigne replied as briefly as civility would allow, Birdie Cox took the place Daisy had made for her beside herself—as ungrudgingly as she could—with ungraciousness.

“Are you engaged for any more dances?” she asked, in an unpleasant undertone.

“Yes; for all, to-night. Are you not?” Daisy quietly answered.

“No, I’m not. You might know that much, I should think, when you see me here!” snapped Birdie, so viciously that Daisy really drew back instinctively, as if

she were likely to get bitten. "No!—nobody has chosen to ask me for the next five dances but Mr. Hunt and Mr. Blount; whom I've had each already three times. But if you think I'm going to dance any more with those stupid owls, and be satisfied with your cast-offs, let me tell you, Miss Daisy, you are *very* much mistaken!"

And Birdie, who was plainly "in a temper" (not a good one!), gazed at her whilom dearest friend with blazing eyes; whilst poor Daisy, unused to such outbreaks, was racking her brain to think what was *the reason* of herself being thus apparently accused for the neglect of Miss Cox by better partners, and the consequent good luck of Castor and Pollux. She might have puzzled herself long enough—since reason Birdie had none.

But Gascoigne now rose, with a ghastly smile of courteousness in answer to the

doctor's last sallies ; vainly hoping to retreat with his small sweetheart to peace elsewhere.

“ You are not going—?” up bounced the doctor, too. “ Why, I had a hundred other questions to ask you.”

“ Another time I shall be most happy,” murmured the victim ; “ but at present will you excuse——” He had got Daisy now safe upon his arm.

“ Dear, dear ; but wait one moment. There is no hurry ! and I wanted particularly to ask you something.” Hereupon the doctor, attempting to buttonhole his retreating prey, had to content himself with getting a small scarlet scrap of uniform between his finger and thumb, with difficulty.

Gascoigne, always as gravely polite as a Spanish hidalgo, stopped still to listen, not betraying a motion of impatience ; though

his every muscle was twitching under the annoyance, as the doctor fumbled on, "I wanted to ask—ah, ah—*what were the crops like* in your part of the country?"

"Papa!" called out Birdie sharply from behind them, where she still sat glaring resentfully at Gascoigne's retreating back, for she had expected him to ask her for the next dance,—“papa, I feel extremely ill, and I must go home immediately.”

"Ill?—my favourite!" and the doctor hopped round like Punch when pretending to be extremely startled.

"Ill?" echoed good-natured Gascoigne, with sudden concern. "What is the matter? Let me bring you some water."

"Water!" . . . sneered the invalid, biting severely at her lace handkerchief, and looking at him as if he had proposed to insult her.

"Wine, then? But you are not faint?"

And the bewildered man gazed inquiringly at her countenance, which even by the gleam of a Chinese lantern overhead he could see was growing of a peony hue; whilst he could not think why Daisy, usually ever ready—and even the afflicted parent—were so tardy in their offers of sympathy and help.

To his horror, the young lady drummed her heels on the ground at him, gasping out,

“Bother! . . . Just leave me alone, Captain Gascoigne. That’s all I ask *you* to do! You could not ask me to dance; or see after my amusement in any way to-night; and now you stand there like a stupid long stick, pretending you are sorry, forsooth!”

“But I really am sorry,” returned Gascoigne, slowly; bearing that test of a true gentleman, how he takes being snubbed by

a lady, with such unflinching courtesy that he seemed a latter-day "perfect knight" to a pair of blue eyes turned on him in secret worshipping. "I am engaged to your eldest sister for the next dance," he continued, "but will you allow me to have another one later on; or may I try to get you some partners?"

Miss Cox the youngest, laughed in hysterical derision, ending with a sort of sniff.

"Indeed I shall not! If you think you can have me come for being whistled to whenever you please, like some other people, you are very much mistaken"—glancing with scorn and sarcasm at her rival, who stood by feeling as small and meek as a mouse. "You don't know *my* spirit! I'm going home at once, and all the rest of them must just come too."

"But, Birdie, my child! Baby, my sweet one!" wheedled the doctor, in a

weak, coaxing tone, being evidently in a ridiculous fright of the said spirit of his daughter. "Come, come; you don't mean it. I'll take you home myself if you really wish it, but the rest are all dancing, you know——"

"And do you really think I'm going home by myself, and leave them all to enjoy themselves?" blazed out Birdie, at white heat; tossing about the sofa-cushions till all three gazers thought she meant to fling them at their heads. "*Will* you go and tell mamma to bring out the other girls immediately? There!—what's the use of your standing looking at me?"

The doctor turned, and fled before her last glance as fast as his short legs could carry him.

"Slowly and sadly" Gascoigne and Daisy followed together, in readiness to support the distempered damsel, who went in front

with heaving breast, and an eye which showed she would permit no such trifling with her outraged feelings as the offer of an arm, or any mock-sympathy, before she deigned to consider herself in need of such assistance.

Near the ball-room door, they found Mrs. Cox and Fuzzy, with woebegone faces, awaiting them. The mother made a pretence at once of seeing to the supposed indisposition of her daughter; who, sinking on a seat, in a studied attitude of pretty prostration, put her hand under her cheek and begged for smelling-salts.

“Isn’t it too bad?” whispered Fuzzy, coming up, with sincere apologies to Daisy. “Pussy and I were enjoying ourselves, too, so much more than we expected after—*those others* had gone, you know.” (Major Hodge and Mr. Jones, no doubt.) “And mamma is so angry that she wanted

to put Birdie in a cab and send her home alone, because she has been jealous and cross all evening ; but papa says we must pretend she really is ill for the sake of appearances. But, most of all, I am sorry for you, dear." Her frank sympathy so warmed Daisy that the latter exclaimed, with prompt responding friendship,

"Don't trouble yourself about me. Let us all go back—poor thing ! I am so sorry she has been vexed."

But Fuzzy turned, unsatisfied still, to express her regret to Jack Dimity and Smiler Lee, who came up just then.

"Oh, don't fret yourself about Daisy," said Jack, bluntly ; who seemed to have been hanging about, and so had an inkling of how matters stood, adding, with an encouraging nod in his sister's direction, "She's so good-natured, she rather likes making an *auto-da-fé* of herself

for other people to warm their feet at."

"What ! the ball-room belle to be carried off so early !" Thus the Smiler, who did *not* understand how the wind blew, was lamenting loudly aside to the said belle. "You looked, excuse my saying so, won't you !—but you did look such a White Angel to-night. Was she not the belle of the night, Gascoigne?" turning for confirmation of his effusiveness of speech.

"Yes," said Gascoigne, briefly, but to the point ; adding, much lower, "Though what I admired most was her sweetness of temper, that was not merely put on, like a new dress."

With what glad, grateful eyes Daisy looked up just one moment ! and met his looking down in return, with an expression that made hers fall, and her heart go pit-a-pat. And now the little doctor, who had been frantically dodging round the out-

skirts of the ball-room, trying to stop Pussy and her partner, who, scenting danger, had been waltzing round and round from him, returned hot and annoyed with the last unwilling and indignant sister—(of charity?)—on his arm; representing to all who offered inquiries or expostulations that his girls' feelings for their invalid made them only anxious to go away and see after her.

“To whip her and put her to bed, I should say,” remarked Essie Smeeth, in a high, disbelieving tone. “Well, if I had a sister like that, I'd teach her better manners.”

As they got into a fly and drove off, Daisy last saw a row of interested faces gazing after them from the flag-lined doorway; the two Smeeth girls and some other friends, who had been “sitting out” with their partners, peeping with amusement

mingled with pity; on the steps outside, Gascoigne, Lee, and Jack looking after them with regret and vexation—which the still unenlightened Smiler, indeed, was loudly expressing by uplifting his voice in lamentation, despite of hints and nudges from either side.

CHAPTER IX.

KATH. "A pretty peat! 'tis best put finger in the eye—an she knew why."

NOT a word was exchanged amongst the Cox family in the fly. But, after some minutes of ominous silence, Mrs. Cox, with a pained civility and kindness quite irksome to Daisy, began gently hoping the latter was not tired. Upon this Birdie at once burst into loud sobbing; observing parenthetically that nobody, not even her own mother, cared about her feelings—to which the rest of her family, by their silence, seemed to give consent.

The doctor, wily parent, was outside on

the box beside the driver, smoking away like a factory chimney, having observed aloud with much inner thankfulness, "that there was no room for him inside"—as there truly was not, since there they were already five.

Arrived home, Daisy, feeling that a household storm had been brewing during the late dreadful stillness, slipped upstairs to her little nest; as the room seemed, which, for its associations with all her new experiences and thoughts in Marstow, she already felt quite sorry to leave—so had her clinging nature already there struck root. She heard a hum of voices below, swelling soon into an angry female clamour; but knew the doctor had basely evaded all this by scuttling—no other word could better express his sidling, crab-like trot—as hastily as possible to his dressing-room.

Daisy was very sleepy, and there stood the great stuffed figure, like an automaton maid. She took off her beautiful gown and hung it over the said "Miss Black," to keep it uncrushed; and soon having forgiven Birdie, and all others who had vexed her, lay down with an innocent mind and happy heart, thinking of—one person.

Soon she was dreaming of this said one person; had perhaps been dreaming of him an hour; but her sleeping ideas had grown oppressed, disturbed.

It seemed that Gascoigne was being dragged from her side by Birdie; that the latter was shrieking in hysterics and calling on him to leave Daisy evermore for herself, that he seemed going—going sadly! but going—! She herself tried to cry out imploringly to him, yet felt so choked she could not

Why, now!—she heard loud wedding-bells for him and Birdie, clanging, clashing in her dream-miseried ears.

Daisy awoke with a great start; heard a loud ringing indeed in the darkness—and springing out of bed, bewildered, opened the door. She saw Fuzzy in her night-gown, ringing the big dinner-bell, and calling Fire! Fire! whilst a cloud of smoke came rolling up the stairs.

CHAPTER X.

“ Thus must I from the smoke into the smother.”

THEN there was confusion in the darkness of the little villa !

Matches were tried to be struck, and would not strike, or the match-box got lost ; clothes were groped after ; aimless wild haste and bewilderment prevailing among most. The two servant-maids clung together on the stairs, impeding progress ; and interchanging shrieks and responses from the litany. Mrs. Cox fled upstairs like a white ghost, not knowing the extent of the danger, but only thinking of saving

her little school-boys and getting them dressed, regardless of later considerations.

The doctor, half-dressed, and almost wholly frantic, was popping out from his dressing-room on to the landing and popping back.

“Save yourselves—” he kept croaking, like a bull-frog gone hoarse with over-excitement. “Don’t mind the furniture! Thank heavens! it’s all only just insured. Save yourselves, my darlings!”

Whereupon he ran a few steps down the stairs in his shirt-sleeves, then ran back again to secure his watch, a cat’s-eye pin set in small diamonds—the gift of a grateful patient, which he greatly valued—and some ready money. With these in both hands he fled from the house bare-headed, shouting Police! down the empty darkness of the Khyber Pass Road, whilst the in-

rushing draught from the open door he had left behind him was not a help to the salvation of his family.

Meanwhile Fuzzy, as if possessed by the spirit of ten housemaids, was carrying great jugs of water to throw on the fire that seemed bursting out of the kitchen, and spreading on that side of the house.

“We must keep the stairs wet; don’t you think so?” she breathlessly said to Daisy, who was close behind her, working as Fuzzy bade with steady, honest courage, though in her heart she had no faith in their quenching the flames any more than if they were to play a fountain into Vesuvius.

But she felt that was none of her business; and not having a genius for taking the lead in emergency, obedience to others was her natural duty.

Both girls, nevertheless, by their en-

couraging example and words, had so wrought upon the servant-maids that these were soon willingly helping in handing down water from the little bath-room, which luckily they could still get at.

“ Oh, lawk !” exclaimed simple Susan, the cook, with a cry of dismay, “ Miss Fuzzy, do stop ; that’s the *hot water* tap, my dear ! It’ll help the fire !”

Upstairs Pussy, with natural calmness, was busily engaged throwing open her wardrobe and drawers, and flinging their indiscriminate contents into her sheets, which she had torn off her bed for that purpose and then knotted together by the four corners, preparatory to pitching them, if necessary, out of the window. Her own best clothes and boots, then even all her second best thus saved, she began with sisterly thought to take the same prudent care for Fuzzy’s worldly goods.

Luckily, (in this firelight view of the case) the small possessions of both sisters consisted mainly of clothes ; for they had few or none of either books or trinkets, all the many knick-knacks and little Lares that young ladies with more extensively cultivated tastes so often accumulate.

All this had occupied but a few minutes ; thus what with the excitement and calling to each other, those below stairs had entirely failed to hear cries from Birdie's room, which Pussy had calmly disregarded, supposing them to proceed merely from hysterics, which sisterly weakness she did not intend should divert her from the pressing nature of her business.

But now the screams had become ear-piercing. Likewise, amidst all the din, a battering could be heard against the inner side of Birdie's door that arrested attention.

“What is it?” they shrieked, hardly pausing in their work.

“Let me out—I’m locked in! I’m locked in!” came back in tones of shrill fear.

“Well, you’ve got the key. Can’t you open the door?” retorted Fuzzy, in an equally sharp screech.

She was not unkind, but excited to highest pitch, feeling scorched, as she had ventured nearest of all to the fire, and in no mood therefore to bear with silly helplessness.

But the answer almost paralysed her.

“I’ve got the key, but it *won’t open the door!* I’ve tried and tried, and screamed to you all, but it won’t—and, oh, my goodness, I’ll be burnt alive!”

Upon which Birdie uttered shrieks, as if already roasting, that turned the women outside white with fear. As Fuzzy whispered, she had run upstairs to escape

scolding, and locked herself in to prevent pursuit—and, no doubt, had done so in such a rage, the key was very possibly injured. They clustered round her door, leaving their efforts against the fire to helping hands, which even whilst Birdie spoke had appeared, in the marvellous way men do arrive for a fire; some passers-by; a few from the neighbouring villas. These Mrs. Cox was now directing, pale and composed, with a quilt draped gracefully around her; being the first thing she could snatch up—for she dared not even return to take her dressing-gown. Thus, with one arm outstretched in continual command, she rather resembled a white statue of Fame, pointing onwards to victory.

A cross-fire of advice, exhortations, and laments outside Birdie's door, only seemed to drive the victim inside to desperation,

who now would do nothing but shake the door; knocking and pushing against the wood as if in blind frenzy.

Daisy, who was coolest of all, could hear with dismay the men muttering to each other that the fire was a bad business, and the engines would be long in coming. Fuzzy and Pussy had now lost their heads, and were imploring their sister to throw her mattress out of the window and jump down upon it; a plan saying something for their fertility of resource, but which Birdie, with distracted "No, no, no's!" refused to attempt—which perhaps said more for her sense.

The maids, keeping up a chorus of pity to each of Birdie's shrieks, had dissolved into such floods of tears they seemed resolved to extinguish the flames merely from their own private resources.

Down knelt Daisy on the floor, and, in a

loud whisper through the keyhole, succeeded in drawing the attention of the distracted girl by the mere force of quietness.

“Turn your key once . . . And now once more,” she advised, in a tone of calm confidence that caused faith.

Birdie obeyed. The door had been plainly double-locked, but still it would not open.

“And now, *push back the bolt*,” uttered Daisy, with a sort of agonised inspiration, her first plan having failed.

It shot back—the door opened.

No one had ever thought of the bolt before; Birdie in her passion had used it contrary to custom, and then forgotten it. Now she was safe, so far at least, among them all, almost rejoicing.

“Ladies, ladies,” cried the men’s voices below. “Dress yourselves and get out of

the house. Look sharp—there is no time to lose. Hurry!”

Doing as they were bidden, all dispersed to pull on hastily what additional garments they could seize—before escaping with what they could save besides from the burning house.

CHAPTER XI.

“Be bold, be bold, and everywhere be bold,
Be not too bold.”

GASCOIGNE and Jack Dimity were going home together after their own ball.

The night was warm and fine. They resolved that walking back to barracks would be pleasantest; they both wished to smoke, and felt more than usually friendly towards each other, although rather unusually silent at intervals.

Their way led them down the Khyber Pass Road, although there was a shorter cut past some mews and through back streets. By himself, Jack would probably have taken this; but his elder friend

questioningly observed, "It is not very pleasant, eh?" which was Gascoigne's way of proposing his likings, and Jack unquestioningly agreed.

Jack always did agree with Gascoigne cheerfully; which was the greatest proof of friendship this young British Army Grumbler could give.

As they neared the road, a fire-engine passed a little ahead of them.

"Why, where is the fire?" they asked each other, in curiosity, and quickened their steps. Turning the corner, and looking towards the well-known villas, one exclamation burst from both.

"It can't be!" just uttered Jack, flinging away his cigar and beginning to run.

"I'm afraid it is," answered Gascoigne, who had started off even quicker than Dimity. They could only see the smoke and a yellow glow beneath it, at first; but

even whilst they ran an occasional great burst of flame would shoot up, showing how the mischief was spreading.

Full-dress uniforms and military great-coats are not the easiest attire for a foot-race; still both were in such alarmed earnest that they went at a tremendous pace, and were near the villa in a wonderfully few seconds, seeing already the groups of staring or helping spectators, black against the lurid light.

“Were all saved? Are any still in danger?” was the question in the minds of both.

As they burst through the outskirts of the little crowd, they breathlessly called out to ask this to right and left. Some of the bystanders answered one thing, some another; they did not know for certain; the police knew; the firemen knew. A lady had been locked into her room and all but

roasted alive, one of the servants had said.

“Was she saved—?” No one rightly knew.

At that moment a great jet of flame, from one of the front windows nearest that side where the fire burnt fiercest, lit up the whole house; and close inside the little window of Daisy's room could be seen a motionless figure, clad in the white ball-dress both men recognised. With a loud cry Jack sprang forward, but was prevented by some of the constables with, “Keep back—keep back, sir; it's dangerous.” He would have broken his way past them, however, but for two loving arms flung round his neck, which stopped him more effectually than would twenty policemen.

But no such sweet gaoler arrested poor Gascoigne.

Without a word of outcry, he too had

seen that white form up there amongst smoke and flame ; seen—and in another second his solitary figure had sprung through the space kept clear before the burning house, and was beheld climbing a ladder that remained planted against the walls. Cries from below, exclamations, warning to go no further, entreaties, even the roar of Jack's great, bellowing shouts, all failed to reach that climber's ears ; or sounded only like an idle hum from the crowd beneath in his terribly intense excitement.

He was at the top of the ladder before any of the many who had rushed forward could have stopped him.

Then a volume of smoke burst out ; and those below saw him stagger and cling to the window-ledge. Gascoigne was, indeed, almost choked by its "hot, black breath."

Next moment, though, he had smashed

the glass of the little window with its one long pane, had reached in though still on the ladder, and dragged out the figure that stood, indeed, close to him ; but even as he brought his prize to open air and closer view, a second burst of smoke, this time mingled with flame, swept into his face.

A great cry burst from the throats of all the little crowd below.

Some of the firemen who had already gone into the circle of danger to succour the gallant gentleman, if possible, now rushed to the foot of the ladder—but were useless. A little way he slipped down the ladder, as if half-choked and unconscious, but still grasping the precious burden he had perilled his life to save.

A little way !—then his grasp relaxed, and he tottered, swayed, and fell heavily

downwards amongst the pitying arms stretched out to break his fall.

They dragged him back to safety, dashed cold water in his face, then when he faintly opened his eyes poor Gascoigne saw, with feeble bewilderment, Daisy—Daisy, whom he had tried to save, sobbing over him, but dressed in a *dark* gown and hat! Meanwhile, prone beside him, on the ground, lay a stiff headless thing, wearing the white ball-dress of his little lady-love. It was the stuffed figure; the ludicrous Aunt Sally, or Galatea, of Jack's creation, at which they had so laughed!

Over both the dummy and his prostrate friend Jack now stood, in a state of mind divided between wild wishes to indulge both in sobbing and laughter; a "high-striking, jolly queer sort of go," to himself altogether unparalleled, indescribable.

“Do you understand, dear old fellow? she is safe—she was safe all the time,” he tried to explain, bending down.

But Gascoigne’s white face was only upturned towards Daisy: he only heard her pitying murmurs; saw her eyes full of a grieving tenderness his mind could not then fathom—soon his own closed again. He knew no more.

Then that night he was carried gently in to Lilac Lodge, and laid on the best bed in the Miss Silverthornes’ house, where those good old ladies flitted about, softly mourning over their poor, brave Gerald. Yet none were more active in bestirring themselves to do all that could be done for him; and in assisting with all their hearts the houseless neighbours, whom they had not “called upon” for so long a time.

CHAPTER XII.

“I’ll taste the luxury of woe.”

EVERYBODY said to each other, “Hot weather !” and the bluebottle-flies buzzed in swarms.

Outside the little garden at Lilac Lodge all was a crimson and yellow hot blaze, what with intense sunlight, scarlet anemones, gaudy tulips, and flaming red-hot-poker plants, all among the parched lilac-bushes, whose glories were dead since spring.

But only a very small view was given of this outside glow and glare ; for there were blinds almost drawn down within the French window, and blinds stretched far

beyond them outside, so that a mere peep was left to show that there was purgatory, and here was paradise.

And indoors, clear white-muslin curtains softly waved in a mysteriously-created draught, and white muslin again in a sort of fluted wainscoting bordered the room, with blue ribbon peeping through it: (the old ladies declared this was only to hide the damaged state of the paint, which was too expensive to repair just now, and really did well enough in winter—but it was so pretty no one quite believed them). And besides, the couches and easy-chairs were draped with bibs and tuckers of snowy muslin and lace, and tied up with pale-blue bows; they reminded one of so many of Sir Joshua Reynolds' "Muslin Misses."

Next door, the half-burnt house stared across the bushes at its trim neighbour,

like a blackened skull, with its eyeless windows and gaping doorway.

It was two days since the fire, but Daisy Dimity felt still in bewilderment ; her soft, simple soul all stirred. She was uncertain whether to look shamefaced or proud, to show her gratitude to Gascoigne, or to be silent.

All the town had been startled by the news of the fire ; excited in mess-rooms and drawing-rooms by Gascoigne's share therein.

First, as it was rumoured that he was in danger, all the world hastened to knock and ring and enquire at Lilac Lodge till the trim maids there were "wore off their feet." Next, when it was found he was doing fairly well, and likely enough to recover soon, there went up a great roar of laughter at the mistake he had made, when meaning to save little Miss Dimity !

People talked of applying to the Humane Society for a medal for him ; of getting up a mock address.

Daisy heard some of these remarks from the coming and going neighbours, and raged and writhed as much as her gentle soul was capable.

Was not the man's gallantry the same ? she asked herself—although the town young ladies called the story “too funny!” and the men laughed at it as the last great joke.

Was he not ill now ; if not in danger, enough so to make her miserable ? Yes ! she would have been miserable for his dear sake, if even *she* had not been the cause.

Then the few callers she could bring herself to meet looked at her strangely, made laughing inuendoes about her second self at the fire and Captain Gascoigne's

devotion. She seemed in a false position ; did not know how to look ; so fled to her room and wept till she looked a ghost.

“The ghost of a white mouse!” said Fuzzy ; who found her way upstairs, and would fain have stayed a while, but that, having been hospitably taken in by the Smeeths, as was also Birdie, she dared not keep these inquisitive friends waiting long below on the gravel.

“Don’t come downstairs, dear ! You’ve got a headache, yes !—of course,” said the good Miss Silverthornes, with delicate, if sometimes bustling, sympathy. “Put up your feet on the sofa, dear child ; there is nothing like that. And let us send you some tea, dear ; just a nice *leetle* cup.”

So morning, noon, afternoon, eve, and night Daisy was offered tea and the sofa ; the sofa and tea ; whilst she felt a bewildered little goose, and did not know

whether to cry or rejoice, be happy or wretched.

She only saw Jack for a few moments ; he was so busy with Gascoigne, and also that, having just been made Instructor of Musketry, he had to take out his men to shoot at the rifle-range outside the town from early morn to afternoon.

He too looked at her strangely.

“ You had better go home, little one,” he bluntly said. “ The old ladies here have their hands full, and the house is crowded,” certainly two more did overcrowd that Lilliput lodge, “ and—and it would be best every way. Take Fuzzy Cox back with you ; as she’s houseless ; and you’d like to have her. I’ll wire to the governor if you like.”

So that was settled of course, as Jack wished it, though his little sister’s heart

was heavy; and to-morrow she and Fuzzy were going back to Elm Hall.

Back; home! And she had not been able to see Gascoigne; he was still so ill, bruised, one arm broken; his face scorched.

Going away for ever to-morrow! and this was such a sultry afternoon—no wonder her head ached and her heart was like a piece of lead.

Jack and Mr. Lee were paying a visit, having come towards afternoon tea-time. Jack was dull, having been up since dewy five that morning, and hearing all day only the inexpressive bang-bang of the "Strappers" firing at the targets. But Lee was as gay as a lark, after playing cricket all day under a broiling sun; besides having insisted on sitting up all the past two nights with Gascoigne. He was indeed always eager and proud to be sick-nurse

to his friends ; being so kind-hearted that it was a real pleasure to him to think he was sacrificing himself for them, besides being much flattered by the praise that his woman-like gentleness, deftness, and high spirits, toned down to proper sick-room cheerfulness, always gained.

“ Burning the candle at both ends ; as usual, you see,” he exclaimed, assuming a sort of half-reckless, half-tragic air, in answer to Miss Prudence’s gentle expostulations on his not having lain down to sleep that afternoon. “ I can’t help it ; it is my nature ! But you see we were playing the Marstown High School to-day, so some of the fellows thought they could not get on without me. And then I had to come on here and see old Gascoigne. I love *taking it out of myself* ; that’s about the truth.”

“Yes, it hits you off to a nicety,” interposed Jack.

“Now, you old growler, be quiet. And then there is a sort of I-don’t-know-what-it-is about this house that attracts one to it. Ah! Miss Prudence; ah! Miss Patience! ‘How happy could I be with either!’—ho! ho! ho!”

One old lady tapped him on the one shoulder, and said he was a pretty fellow; the other tapped him on the other shoulder, and said he was a sad fellow. They both were vastly delighted with his little compliments, and looked like two primly-sweet dried lavender stalks, trying for a moment to be coquettish.

“And then,” continued the Smiler glancing at Daisy, who in a pink and white cotton frock sat in a corner on a stool, sewing very quickly, with downcast eyes

and tightly-shut little mouth—"And then how could anyone allow Marstown's fairest visitant—good, that!—to go away from us to-morrow without coming to say good-bye to her? Excuse me, won't you" (to Daisy), "but really, as I was saying to Gascoigne last night, 'pon my honour we shall all miss you dreadfully. It won't be like the same town. When shall I ever have another swinging dance like that *last one*?"

This was all said with so much momentary sincerity that Daisy's eyes quite brightened, and her mouth relaxed.

So that had been part of his nightly talk with Captain Gascoigne! She felt quite affectionate towards Lee; and indeed, ever since the fire, nothing could have been more discreetly kind than his manner towards herself. Ready to join in good-fellowship with all the world, he no doubt went into fits of laughter at his friend's

mistake every half-hour; alternately rushing into diffusive praise of their fellow-Strapper's gallant conduct, upholding that same, none the less, with good-naturedly jealous *esprit de corps*.

Perhaps Jack felt like Daisy somewhat:—that he did not quite know how to take the matter.

So he avoided the rest of the world for a few days, and spent most of his time in Lilac Lodge: patted Daisy kindly on the shoulder, but was very silent, which made him wrongly seem grumpy.

As Lee was finishing off the first gush of his pleasing little flatteries to the fair sex, and was beginning to think of what consoling or amusing speeches he could take across the passage into the sick-room, who should drive up through the low sunlight, heated and dusty, but Una Goodchild? In she burst with her usual headlong im-

pulsiveness that was romantic but not ungraceful, and falling on the necks of all three ladies in turn, just as they came, cried irrespectively,

“Oh! my *dear*—what an event!! what you must have gone through in mind!”

“*Indeed, we did!*” all three answered, each for herself; one Miss Silverthorne thinking of the responsibilities of changing bandages, the other of anxieties in cooking for sick gentlemen.

“But what a noble, gallant thing it was to be saved so, wasn’t it!” went on Una, her gray eyes kindling with enthusiasm, though it was doubtful whether the thing meant was Daisy, the dummy, or had confused reference to Gascoigne. She looked at Daisy, as she added under her breath, “How happy you must be to have inspired such a noble deed! During those moments you must have felt like *living?*”

“Indeed I felt much more like dying; and I never was more miserable !”

There was plenty of truth but no atom of heroic stuff in Daisy’s voice, as she replied.

Though question and answer were meant to be private between the girls, both the young men overheard them. The Smiler instantly ducked behind an ottoman, and holding up a cushion, in which he buried his sleek little head, gave way to violent pantomimic gestures of mirth at their romanticism, drawing up his knees to his chin and quivering all over.

But he was behind the girls.

Poor Jack, on the contrary, who was facing them, only grinned in a suppressed way, and was instantly withered by their looks; especially so by Una Goodchild, which was very hard, considering he had rather admired her. When the young

ladies turned round, Lee's fit of convulsion was over; and with the air of a very good boy he was patting the sofa cushion straight. After this they both addressed him with unusual graciousness, to mark slight displeasure with Jack. Such is often the luck of the unworthy.

At this moment a loud ringing was suddenly heard at the bell.

CHAPTER XIII.

“Tante buone che non val niente.”

WHO could it be, ringing at the Lilac Lodge bell in this way? The Smiler flew to reconnoitre from behind a blind in the front drawing-room; then raised his eyebrows and hands, and almost his hair in surprise.

“Miss Black, by all that’s lovely!” he murmured, faintly.

Miss Black! The old ladies drew themselves up and looked at each other; a displeased thrill tingling through them.

“To ring the bell!” ejaculated one.

“When we had written up expressly not to do so,” added the other.

“And so violently!”—ended the first.

The smiling maid, who had gone to the door, now came to her mistresses without a smile for the moment; and in a very prim voice whispered, that the young lady outside wished to know if she might be allowed to nurse Captain Gascoigne.

The little old ladies bounced up as if touched by an electric shock; a sort of shiver seized them; then their very caps seemed to quiver and bristle. “We will speak to the—the young lady ourselves,” they replied, with intense propriety; signing to the middle-aged maid to retire to the kitchen recesses, for they fondly believed her to be still a mere child in years, as she had been when first she came to

them. Then both moved in a most dignified manner to the door, but there turned, almost appealingly. "Surely she is not, this Miss Black—she could not be—a great friend of our dear Gerald's?"

"Not that I ever heard of. I hardly thought he knew her," answered the Smiler, smiling no more, in a rather quavering voice ; being thoroughly taken aback, and meditating that since Miss Black knew himself much better, what might not be *his* fate were he to fall ill.

"He just knew her as little as he possibly could. All the friendship was very much on her side," said Jack, bluntly, though he had hesitated still more in taking upon himself to speak so far plainly. Both, being men, of course tried to conceal their surprise ; whilst Una and Daisy sat in speechless indignation, as utter country maidens.

“ We understand.”

The Silverthorne sisters rustled out closely side by side, mutually supporting each other in silver-grey severities of appearance ; their tulle caps, snowy curls, black lace, lavender gowns, all seemingly transformed in sternness.

They closed the door carefully behind them ; the excited listeners could hear nothing, but in three minutes they saw a smart girl's figure, tighter-waisted, higher-heeled, and with a brighter complexion than ever, marching hastily from the door. (“ Quicker than she came !” thought Daisy, clasping her hands in secret vengefulness, for once in her life, over her rival's discomfiture.) There was such an air of mysterious reticence about both old ladies when they returned, however, that no one ventured to ask how they had routed the invader.

“A little mistake,” was all Miss Prudence observed, primly crossing her mittened hands.

“The young lady felt needless anxiety on the score of how Captain Gascoigne would be taken care of, as she did not know *us*. That was all. . . . And I do not think she will think it necessary to come back again,” added Miss Patience, with an anciently innocent air, that made Jack grin again, unlucky fellow! whilst Lee, hiding himself behind Una, Daisy, and a feather-fan, writhed like a gay eel in private ecstasy.

Of course tea was now brought in. Such teas as those two old ladies gave! It had a finer flavour, and was sipped out of more delicate china, than that of anyone else. In winter their guests had such profusion of hot cakes, that other roused housekeepers begged the receipt of them ;

yet their cooks never could *quite* succeed in the baking ; in summer the cream and fruit had quite a country charm, the latter chosen in the market whilst the rest of Marstown was still dawdling over breakfast.

And then Una explained the cause of her visit : which was to beg Daisy to come and stay with her at Fairlawns.

“My father has got an attack of gout, so he and my mother are going to Buxton. Now, as I hate fashionable watering-places, I thought we two could have such a nice, long summer quietly together. None of my six brothers will be likely to come home ; but, thank goodness, you are like me, not a girl who ever cares much for gentlemen’s society,” she ended, with eagerness.

At this last, Jack looked glum ; Lee comical ; Daisy innocently a little dubious.

Una was grievously disappointed when she understood the impossibility of her plan.

“I never cared to have a girl friend before ; my six brothers were always sufficient for me. And I did think we should get on so well with our studies.”

Daisy at this felt a mysterious dig at her waist, startingly fraternal ; just as of her own accord she exclaimed,

“Oh ! *how* well you and Polly would agree together ! Indeed, you must come to Elm Hall instead. That will be the very thing.”

It proved, after some hesitation about acceptance, to be indeed the very thing to please Una and everybody. After which poor Daisy felt an equally mysterious, delighted tattoo on her back, which only sisterly affection enabled her to bear without wincing.

The talk now turned upon the Coxes.

Lee had seen the little doctor hopping amongst the ruins of his house, calculating in delight how much he gained by its late insurance.

Fuzzy and Birdie were reported as having been received with open arms by the good-natured Smeeths, in spite of previous slight differences.

"I always knew there was good in those girls," said Jack, heartily.

"Yes," said both Daisy and Smiler together.

"What, the Miss Smeeths; I have seen them. I did not know they were ladies," quietly remarked Una.

"Neither did we," primly added the old Miss Silverthornes.

Jack looked out of the window, thinking what prejudices even the most excellent people may have.

Daisy quite cleverly turned the talk by pitying Mrs. Cox. Poor thing! She had disliked the roving life she had led when her little doctor had been in the army, and had just been so happy in her new house——

“By Jingo! Talk of an angel—here she comes with all her daughters. This is to say good-bye to you, Daisy.”

It proved so, indeed. But Birdie seemed to have come with ungraciousness, since she began to say,

“Well, here I am! I was just dying to be at the evening band with the Smeeths; but Fuzzy dragged me here to see the last of you, so I hope you are satisfied.”

“I am so sorry——” began Daisy, distressed.

“Not at all,” quickly put in Fuzzy, with an indignant glance at her younger sister.

“It is only Birdie’s fun. And even the Smeeth girls send you their warmest love ; and were wanting to come with us to see you themselves, but that I told them you had a head-ache.”

“And because they copied your best white dress exactly in cheap baptiste, and furniture lace at threepence a yard, and thought you’d be offended, for theirs look just as nice,” put in Birdie, with malice.

“Do be quiet ; when the people have been so kind to you !—” murmured Fuzzy, almost angrily, adding aloud to Daisy, “They did not mean to wear them till you were gone, dear ; but they had nothing else fresh. They told me to say they hoped you would not mind.”

“Not at all,” cried Daisy, heartily.

“Well, shall we go to the band *now* ?” asked Birdie, jumping up, so her sister was obliged to take her off.

Mrs. Cox now affectionately seated herself beside her late little guest; and although her elegant professions of regret at the latter's departure were perhaps somewhat affected, yet, as she thanked Daisy for having worked so indefatigably at the fire, her eyes were really wet with some mild tears—poor soul!

“Oh, my dear,” she whispered, taking Daisy's hand as they sat apart and giving it a little squeeze. “It is all very well for the doctor to make jokes about the insurance-money, but what does he care? He says he and Birdie will go off to Scarborough for a month, and have a lark together till the new house we think of taking in Singlebrick Terrace is built. But he never thinks of all the work I shall have furnishing all again, and the servants, and—everything. Not, indeed, that I want him to stay, or Birdie, either; we

can get on quite well without them, of course," (another little squeeze hinted most privately, *You understand!*). "And, my dear, did you know my Indian shawl was burnt; the one you have seen me wear sometimes? That will never be replaced to me."

Poor, poor Mrs. Cox! Seen her wear that Indian shawl! Yes, verily; scores of times!

Was it not her one silver-papered, tin-boxed treasure of a shawl; her flag of gentility, wedding-shawl, christening-shawl, impress-the-Marstown-natives shawl on all occasions?

Daisy's heart was sore for her; she did so wish it was in her power to replace that shawl. Jack had brought one home, certainly, but that was for his step-mother. But, if ever it were in her power, she now made a small vow to give Mrs. Cox

another and finer Indian shawl. And indeed, to peep into futurity, she was curiously able soon after to do so—one like that brought home by Jack.

“Still, don’t let Fuzzy hurry back from you to help me, dear,” confidentially whispered the mother. “Now, don’t—for it will do her good to have a little change from here, and Pussy is very satisfied to stay.”

As she spoke, Pussy was being teased, to her evident satisfaction, by Lee on the subject of the neighbour in whose house Mrs. Cox, Pussy, and some others of the family had received shelter on the night of the fire. The neighbour was middle-aged, a bachelor, and a new-comer to Khyber Pass Road, whose older inhabitants had freely criticised him.

“Going to stay on for a fortnight or three weeks! Lovely! And you think

Mr. McNought is a very nice man ; though last week you abused him as a disgustingly rich, retired carpet-maker, with a wig and false teeth. Oh, Miss Pussy, Miss Pussy !”

“ He is very kind—and such a modest man,” softly answered the fair one, casting down her eyelids.

A burst of laughter greeted this announcement.

“ Pussy means about himself, his having got on so well in life, and made so much money,” observed Mrs. Cox, growing rather red, and coming to the rescue, “ and so humble-minded towards us about his own family, too.”

“ Ah, yes ! He *has* no family, of course—quite a self-made man, we hear. Very proper ; shows a nice feeling on his part,” simpered both the old ladies in symphony.

“ Yes, indeed. And he is so pressing

for us to stay on until we can get quite settled," continued the poor lady, rising rather nervously, and making a movement as *if* she were drawing the Indian shawl round her shoulders—whereas she had now no shawl at all. "He is all that is hospitable and good, though such a very unassuming man." With which, she took a final farewell of Daisy.

CHAPTER XIV.

“The little daisy that at evening closes.”

EVENING had come.

Outside in the garden-plot of Lilac Lodge, Jack and Una, with a great air of being a practical couple and above all nonsense of flirtation, were busying themselves in watering the drooping flowers by way of being useful to the Miss Silverthornes. The old ladies looking out, gently ignoring this object, only observed to each other, “They make a pretty couple.”

Why should the charms of twilight in

the country alone be so often praised in ballads or novels? In a lesser degree, of course, but still in some degree, its gentle influence steals also over a town preparing to sleep. Its power of *abstraction*, first perhaps among all men, or at least poets, brought to notice by old Wordsworth, that

“ Priest to us all
Of the wonder and bloom of the world,”

—its soft veiling of all mean things or ephemeral in the world and daily life—is felt here likewise.

In Miss Silverthorne’s lilac bushes out yonder, to be sure only brown sparrows are nestling down for the night, but have not these little bird town-Arabs had their nests and loves, joys and troubles to a degree that might interest us not much less than the songsters of the glade. There are no wild things here to come stealing out of brakes and glens, it is true; no hares

or rabbits, badgers or foxes, to feed or roam unmolested; only cats to vex us, and perhaps rats, mice, and such small deer. But it is the hour for weary shop-girls, and hard-worked little maids of various kind, to slip forth and enjoy their stolen ramble; or, it may be, only stand at the near street corner some hasty moments, enjoying the coolness, and no doubt a gossip with a neighbour little maid. They are not thinking of the Infinite; they are thinking, bless their hearts! of red-coated corporals or blue-breasted artillerymen.

Indoors, Daisy was sitting with the two old ladies in the darkened drawing-room, that looked like a shrine to *Sainte Mousse-line*. They were all three strangely silent, and seemed stilly occupied in listening to the faint sounds—they could not hear the words—of the voices in the garden.

Young Lee had gone after tea to see

Gascoigne, who had been given the two little opposite rooms on the ground-floor—one being the old ladies' private snuggerly; into which last, by hard pleading that he was much better, he had been allowed to come this evening.

The drawing-room door was slightly ajar, so presently they distinctly heard the Smiler opening the opposite one, and saying, in his cheery tones,

“Well, good-bye; and mind you keep your spirits up, there's *nothing* like it, I assure you!” with almost pathos of earnestness; then, in a burst of humour, “By the way, I was nearly forgetting to give you the colonel's message, when he heard your complexion was a bit scorched. ‘Tell him,’ said he: ‘Beauty's but skin deep, an' scarcely whan it's scarlet!’—ho! ho! ho! Capital proverb, isn't it?—*an' scarcely whan it's scarlet!*”

There came an answering, deeper haw haw, from within the room ; plainly the invalid was capable of liking a joke.

Then the Smiler departed ; having either duty or some half a dozen engagements obliging him, with effusive regrets, to tear himself away from Lilac Lodge.

A still deeper silence fell on the three female occupants of the drawing-room. Tick-tack! tick-tack! Daisy heard the clock-strokes for at least ten moments, whilst she was longing to say something, but had not the courage.

“A-hem!” uttered Miss Prudence, at last.

What an alarming noise it was in the stillness!

“Did you speak—?” enquired Daisy, with a great start.

“No ; no ; nothing, my dear,” answered

Miss Prudence with flustered apology, subsiding into her former silence.

Tick-tack! tick-tack! How terrible it seems to find oneself reduced to listening to the clock ticking—as if, *when* it would end, one might feel brave enough to say something very particular.

“Ah-hem-*em*!” then came from Miss Patience suddenly, with such additional emphasis that Daisy asked, with a still more nervous start,

“Did you want—you *were* saying something?”

“No, no—only” (hem!) “clearing my throat, my dear,” replied Miss Patience hesitating, with quite a guilty air.

But twice the spell had been broken; the third time had come. Now or never!

Daisy now, not knowing how she found

her own voice, began to speak; and it sounded quite modestly courageous, though she was really trembling all over.

“I want to say, please, that I should like just to thank Captain Gascoigne before I go away.”

There!—it was out at last; the worst was over.

Remark also, she did not say, “Shall you be shocked”—or, “Do you think it would be thought very improper”—though on these questions she had been troubling herself. With all her soft ways and modest fears, she went straight to her point, and would keep to it.

The two old ladies seemed vastly fluttered yet relieved.

If Daisy’s face had a sweet crimson flush, theirs were quite tinged with pink.

“It seems to us that it would be only what is proper, my dear—that really you

could do *no less*," softly said the one, with much agitated emphasis.

The other added, looking very straight out of the window, and with quite a positively stern tenderness of inflection,

"In fact, knowing poor dear Gerald as we do, from the time he learned to run and say his prayers (I don't mean that he did both at the same time; you know what I mean, dear), we should have felt really *hurt* if you had not proposed doing so."

The snuggerly in which poor Gascoigne was sitting, by way of "a change," was one of the most unlikely little rooms in which one might expect to see a man; above all one like him, who whether well or ill was essentially manly in his ways, and in general strong and active.

It was, in the first place, the almshouse for all the decrepit furniture possessed by the old ladies; spider-like chairs and tables,

and a great, worm-eaten, carved chest ; all so scrubbed and rubbed, it was a wonder they survived, though shining as they tottered.

The carpet also and curtains were marvels of patriarchal patchwork, heavily edged with cross-stitch embroidery, each square of patchwork being moth-eaten, and brushed "to the last threads."

All around were primly placed an aged host of fine-beaded, faded silk cushions, little foot-stools, that tripped one up unawares ; old shells, feather fans, and mineral specimens adorning the mantel-piece ; old black-paper silhouettes of departed friends hung in black frames on the walls ; and, do not laugh ! in a small book-case, all the old, very old children's books that had once amused the two little, short-waisted misses who were now the old Miss Silverthornes ; perhaps the

most amusing amongst them being Mrs. Trimmer's "Robins."

In one corner lay, partly out of sight, two guitar-cases.

It was only in this room, safe from all intrusion—only here that alone, or at most when together, the old ladies would venture to take out again these instruments of youth, with their blue ribands, and thrum them, and hum to them with secret pleasure, although regrets for the past voices of their youth. Alack-a-day! We would so gladly remain young for all our lives long.

Moreover, this room was also used by the sisters for such delicate culinary or distilling mysteries as they trusted to no one but themselves, and for which the kitchen was unsuitable. Lately they had been making here a *pot-pourri* of roses, of which the whole room was redolent.

Into this snuggerly and Gascoigne's presence, Daisy was now ceremoniously introduced, as it were, by Miss Prudence. Her would-be deliverer rose with some little difficulty of stiffness, out of a deep arm-chair to meet her, upon which Daisy at once cried out,

“Oh! please don't get up.”

To this Gascoigne, who would have tried to rise as a matter of course, if even he had been much more ill, in any lady's presence, only replied by saying, with a nervous laugh,

“Will you excuse my offering you my left hand; as my right arm is not quite well yet.”

Well! It had been broken, and was now strapped up and swathed. With this romantic outburst, and looking remarkably shy of each other, these two young people met.

Miss Silverthorne seemed almost as flustered as themselves ; far less events being sufficient to disturb the tranquil pool of her own and her sister's existence.

“ I must go away for a few minutes, my dear Gerald, to see about some gru—beef-tea, I mean, for you to take the last thing at night ; a little eating induces sleep so wonderfully. And also, the doctor considered it bad for you to talk to two or three persons at a time, so we must be very, very careful to do as he bids us, you know. But I shall be back again very soon ; and . . . and, Daisy, my dearest, you might show Captain Gascoigne any of those books on the table meanwhile, if you think they would amuse him.”

Modest, good-hearted old spinster ! Having thus, as she believed, thrown a veil of perfect propriety over her real object in leaving these two together, she retired.

The books she had pointed to, with the object of giving the young people some pretext of occupation, had been withdrawn from the sitting-room as too unfashionable, but also too beloved to be exposed to the possible criticisms of visitors; old annuals, bound in red watered-silk, dimmed with years; collections of photographs, taken when the art was in its awkward infancy, now yellow or mildewed.

Daisy, who had looked after her chaperon's retreating figure with secret trembling, now glanced, with almost equal dismay, at a crabbed copy of Thomson's "Seasons" that lay nearest her hand; then gazed on the ground and wished herself a hundred leagues away, after all the longing she had felt to see Gascoigne face to face, and be able to thank him her very self. Her heart was fluttering like a little

frightened bird; she could not raise her eyes; she dared not speak!

But Gascoigne, who had recovered himself by virtue of his manhood and added years, first broke the silence by saying, in what sounded a grimly jesting tone,

“I am a rather unsightly object, I am afraid, Miss Dimity, for any lady who is good enough to visit me. What a hearty laugh you must all have had at my stupidity!”

“Oh, no—no! no—no!” uttered poor Daisy, with quick crimson blushes; all the modest romance in her heart so dashed by his apparent raillery she *could* not say what she had felt—at least, not just yet. So she sat on blushing whilst Gascoigne, with some nervousness, too—and kindly wishing to let her recover herself—and terribly afraid of being thanked—with his

left hand hastily fluttered the leaves of an old brown album.

“What is this? Should you like to look over it?” in his own perturbation of mind holding it himself, so that she could not possibly see it. “Ah! this reminds me of an old verse—do you know it?—

‘She kept an album, too, at home,
Well-filled with all an album’s glories—
Paintings of butterflies, and Rome—
Patterns for trimmings—Persian stories—
Soft songs to Julia’s cockatoo,
Fierce odes to Famine and to Slaughter—
And autographs of Prince Le Boo—
And recipes for elder-water.’”

“What a wonderful memory you have!” murmured Daisy admiringly, in a meek, small voice. “No, I don’t know it; I know very little. I—I am going home to-morrow, Captain Gascoigne.”

“Going home,” echoed Gascoigne, cheerfully. “Well, I congratulate you. You

must be very glad to leave a hot, dusty town, and be going back to green fields. Are you not?"

"N-o."

"What? not to see your own family again; when you told me you were hardly happy away from them, and when there will be so much new to tell them? You must like that."

"No—not exactly. I mean, I should, of course, any other time; but now—" upon which, Daisy seemed to find herself and her sentence and her momentary bravery all dissolving into tears. Through this blinding state of affairs she contrived, nevertheless, to add, in broken words, "I mean, nobody *could* like to go away whilst you are ill—when—especially—because! . . . Oh, please, Captain Gascoigne, I want to thank you so very much! But I could not do it sooner." Whereupon both Daisy's

plump little hands went up to hide her face; and all efforts at trying to look as if there was nothing the matter failed, so that she sobbed unrestrainedly.

In the midst of this total overflowing of emotion, when her usual barriers of self-control were all carried away, she knew nothing for certain—but had a vague idea that Gascoigne too had put aside his air of kindly unconcern; then, as she sobbed still, that his composure more and more utterly vanished—till at last it quite broke down. She heard, in accents of deepest distress and most tender commiseration, “Poor little thing—! Don’t! don’t cry so terribly. Was it on my account; tell me . . . tell me . . . *Yes?*” This last word, though not uttered much above a whisper, was still an ecstatic and louder echo of a most faintly, small admission that only just succeeded in escaping

Daisy's lips. It gave Gascoigne the most honest and hearty delight he had perhaps ever felt in his life ; likewise an overwhelming desire to console his little sweetheart for her grief that he should have suffered at all on her behalf, while he had freely ventured his life for her.

He forgot his illness ; Daisy forgot all things on earth but him, and what he then began to say. Miss Prudence, apparently immersed in the merits or demerits of the beef-tea, seemed to forget them both !

When they returned to common sense, and a more ordinary state of feeling, it seemed to them as if a small revolution had taken place in the world. They had been in Arcadia during the short period not fully described—whilst Jack and Miss Goodchild were still quietly watering the flowers outside—and while Miss Prudence was yet in the kitchen.

“Do you know that Mr. Dimity, your father, has written inviting me to Elm Hall, as soon as ever I am well enough to go?” said Gascoigne then, which was his first sentence of returning common-place; but he looked more happy over it than common-place feeling required.

“What!—has he really? How delightful! But—but are you coming, Captain Gascoigne? For you might think it dull with us in the country, after Marstown.”

Gascoigne burst out laughing so cheerfully that Miss Daisy’s modest fears on the all-important point of this great lord of creation’s amusement were dispelled for evermore.

“If you knew how I hate garrison towns you would not say that. One’s only daily object seems to be taking long rides or walks to get out of them. In fact, Miss Dimity, I am so tired of my round of pres-

ent existence, that I purpose retiring very soon from the army, and settling down under my ancestral roof-tree; in preparation for which, I think a visit to Elm Hall might accustom me gradually to such a great change of life. What do you say to my plan?"

Miss Dimity, however, would not say what she thought of his plan.

"I have not answered the squire yet," went on Gerald, with an irrepressible smile, which, although he tried to assume gravity, would break out in a Will-o'-the-wisp fashion, lighting up his eyes, and indeed all features of his face alternately. "I waited to accept, till I could ask whether *you* would make me welcome."

To this Miss Dimity did vouchsafe a reply; which, though partly inaudible, seemed thoroughly contenting to her questioner.

"There is one person, however, who will

feel very badly treated, I fear, by this arrangement of ours," continued Gascoigne, with a deep mock sigh.

"Who? Not Jack; he won't growl at all—at least very little—I am sure! Unless, of course, at your leaving his regiment—he is such a friend of yours."

"No, not Jack. He may be brought to forgive me."

"It is Polly, of course. Ah! but you don't know my sister Polly, or you would not think that. Poor Polly!—she is so unselfish."

"No, I don't mean Polly."

"You mean my father, then; but he is so kind."

"Oh! no; I don't."

"Mrs. Dimity, perhaps; still she could *hardly* much mind."

"No."

Daisy's thoughts, as a last resource, flew to the tribe; with simple wonder how her lover could have heard of them, unless from Jack.

"Then it is my next brother Billy."

"No."

"Or Bobby."

"No."

"Jemmy then, because I teach him his lessons."

"No."

"Well, Charlie—" in desperation.

"No."

"Then there is only the baby left, and he minds about nobody," cried Daisy, fairly giving up.

"No," said Gerald, finally, with a broad, peculiar smile. "*But what will Jerry Brown say?*"

"Jerry Brown! I never told you his

name the other night. I know I did not ! How did you know it ?—do tell me ; please do tell me !”

But Gascoigne was laughing with such inward chuckling and immense enjoyment that he really could not tell her—just yet.

“You must have met him when you were staying with your uncle, at Barley Vicarage,” responded Daisy, with an air of having guessed the puzzle most wisely, yet being puzzled.

“Exactly so—” agreed Gascoigne, adding hastily, “When I go to Elm Hall, I will tell you more about him, perhaps—but not now.”

For Miss Prudence was returning, beating some mixture most delicately with a tinkling sound, as of a silver spoon against the best china cup in their pantry ; which mixture was a temptingly rare, secret decoction meant to rouse the jaded appe-

tite of the poor invalid—who since his illness had only been offered about double as many meals as those he usually partook of.

CHAPTER XV.

“I remember, I remember
The house where I was born ;
The little window where the sun
Came peeping in at morn.”

AND now Daisy was fairly on her homeward journey, speeding back in the train towards Elm Hall. But not alone, as she had gone to Marstown ; for Fuzzy Cox sat opposite her, with a brighter face than she had worn since several days ; and also—a gentleman.

At the station Daisy had heard herself accosted by a mild voice, and turning saw the Reverend Adolphus Younghus-

band, who was likewise going home to his vicarage beside Elm Hall. He was full of mild surprise that Daisy and Miss Cox should be returning on the very same day actually as himself; and seemed to think it quite a small dispensation of Providence, for which all three ought to be grateful.

“It is such a risk for two young ladies to travel alone, without a—a gentleman to look after them, you know,” he added; making a gentle rush for a train that was just starting for the opposite end of England to that they were bound for—and being repelled, to his bewilderment, by a stern porter.

Daisy felt quite sure that they two girls would have had a much safer journey under the guard’s silver-tipped care, and even a more enjoyable one. But she did not like to be unkind. Also, Fuzzy expressed herself so delightedly of a con-

trary opinion, and talked with such town-bred fluency of speech and vivacity of topic, that the country celibate seemed quite bewitched by the spell of her eloquence.

So Daisy soon left them to themselves ; and retiring to the opposite end of the carriage she watched the flying landscape, and smiled at happy, inward thoughts in a way that seemed quite silently sociable to the others—who, whenever they looked round, perceived she was in such a blissful daydream that, out of pure kindness, they would not disturb her.

It was late evening when they arrived at their small roadside station.

There, waiting outside for them, was not the heavy close carriage with its fat horses ; but, to Daisy's immense joy, young Polly sitting jauntily in the squire's stanhope behind his fast cob, which it was

the greatest of favours on his part to lend to wife, son, or daughter.

“There you are, dear! I am so glad to see you back; but I can’t come down to kiss you, because of this horse,” called out Polly with lofty affection from her proud position, as if she dared not let go the reins of that fiery steed an instant, even though the groom stood at his nose; but quite sure Daisy would perfectly understand the situation. “Please ask Miss Cox to excuse me,” with quite a grown-up air. “And I have brought the light cart in for your luggage.”

Daisy looked up at her sister with almost speechless admiration. To have managed to acquire the use of the stanhope, and the light cart, and a new woman-of-the-world air—none of which she had ever had before her elder’s short absence—was truly marvellous.

“How well you are looking, Polly darling!” she answered, standing on tiptoe, since as yet she could do no more, to gaze up with a very bright face. “It was such a clever plan of yours to drive in for us like this.”

At this moment her late clerical protector came meekly out of the station-master’s office—having discovered that his largest black portmanteau had gone to York. He carried a small black valise in his hand, which was all the luggage remaining to him; and, looking at the dusty road with still greater meekness, prepared to foot it on a pilgrimage homewards.

Fuzzy Cox, meanwhile, flickered, as it were, with bright consolation and deepest sympathy around him. The fair young celibate smiled resignedly at her, as they stood apart in the evening sunlight. In his

hour of trial, cheered by such an angel met unawares, he could not show himself utterly ungrateful. They were quite forgetful for a moment of the sisters, who gazed at them in surprise.

Daisy explained matters to Polly so far as she knew: although she did not know that Fuzzy had just used her much larger experience of active life than the curate's to stir up the stolidity of the station-master; besides putting the confused Adolphus gently right on the subject of where he had last seen his lost goods, which she knew much better than himself.

"We'll ask him to drive back with us—the very thing!" declared Polly, with amused promptitude; and whilst Daisy was still sweetly deliberating, she had called out,

"Mr. Younghusband! Mr. Younghus-

band! You must not think of walking; there is a seat behind here, please take it."

"*How nice!*" just murmured Fuzzy, with glad grace. It seemed to the curate that, but for the slight emphasis she laid on her sentence, it would have floated light as thistledown past his dull ears. He hesitated still; looked twice at the road; then at her—and hesitated no more.

"You sisters will have so much to say to each other at first—oh, I know!—that you must not trouble yourselves to treat me as 'company.' No, indeed. I will not interfere for worlds. Let me sit behind, or anywhere," cried Fuzzy, now coming up, with merry triumph, though some surprise in her eyes.

"Well, if you *don't* mind—thank you very much," replied Polly, replying with a quickness of tact that only natural apti-

tude, not her limited experience, could have taught her.

“You would like to drive back, Daisy, of course?” went on the young sister, magnanimously offering to give up the reins.

“No, no ; I would rather just sit beside you this time, dear,” answered Daisy, who dearly loved driving—and, above all, driving the cob ; but who had a fine perception of Polly’s moods, with loving regard for them. She herself came back as one who had been in the giddy whirl of Marstown ; that gay garrison town, full of fair women and brave men, as she knew it seemed to the simple dwellers in green fields afar. She knew—from having so thought herself in her days of previous purely country life ; and should she now take the small but still prized pleasure of driving the cob home from Polly ?

“Well; perhaps it is just as well, as I have got my hand *in* with him—and you must be a little out of practice,” answered the younger sister with secret satisfaction, but a still somewhat lofty air.

For the cob was not to be had every day, as Daisy would soon find again; although it was just possible that, having emerged from her chrysalis state into that of a ball-butterfly, she might have come home with new-fangled ideas, and a head slightly turned by the attentions of wasp-waisted, red-coated officers.

Young Polly was as good a girl of her age as could be. But she was still a school-room chrysalis, and severe!—Shade of Rhadamanthus! how severe such young persons are!

So, although she loved Daisy with her whole heart, still, moved perhaps by some

unguessed envy, the poor grub felt inclined to suspect her sister of fine *debutante* airs and contempt of the former simple delights they two had always shared.

“ Oh, Polly dear !” now said Daisy, with a restful smile and a gaze round of utter satisfaction. “ It does seem so nice to be home again.”

Polly looked round somewhat amazed, then became slowly mollified.

They turned down among lanes, dusty no doubt below, but oh ! so shady and in-arched with elm-trees overhead, so high-banked and pleasantly tangled with red woodbine and milky bindweed trails ; while through each gate they could see green seas of wheat or corn-fields, all over the gentle dimpling level of a midland plain, dotted with broad-topped trees and varied with deep-hearted hedgerows, and, in some

corners of neglected earth, already a blush of scarlet poppies that would soon become a blaze.

“There is the church spire!” cried Daisy again, in simple ecstasy.

Home! home! that was indeed what she had craved for when so miserable lately; to hear Polly’s voice, to see all her loved ones, the well-known fields, the rookery, the dear old house with all its old associations (although, indeed, neither she nor it was aged, comparatively speaking). But Polly, now becoming perfectly soft to her heart’s core, began to take an opposite view of the case, almost pityingly superior.

“Come—were you not happy away, at the end of your visit, dear? Was the gaiety Dead Sea fruit? That I can quite well understand—from reading about it, you know.” Polly’s mind had been thus enlightened by a judicious selection of

school-room light literature, in which all the good heroines got wealthily married, after tasting of the world's frivolities and much misliking them.

Daisy looked in turn rather shamed.

"It is not that. I was most wretched at one time—but at the end I was *very* happy; although I can't help being glad to come home and tell you and the rest all about it. For, oh! Polly, what do you think——" Then she lowered her voice, so did Polly her head; and soon how those two did talk—in a whispered, eager rushing together of their minds.

There was no need to be afraid of being overheard, either; for those behind were too earnestly occupied in unfolding and learning the mysteries of ecclesiastical, ritualistic vestments; alb and cope and chasuble.

"How beautiful it must be to work

them !” exclaimed Fuzzy ; then with a little sigh, “ I—I have had a good deal of practice in embroidery.” (Yes ! the Major’s slippers.)

Meanwhile, in front, Polly was murmuring as one who had received a great shock, yet had wisely expected it in a manner, “ And so he’s an officer— !”

“ Yes, but really you would never think it !—and he’s going to leave and live at his own house, you know,” answered Daisy, quite apologetically. She knew that, while her own foregone ideas as to officers had been of modern Ivanhoes or grizzly heroes, her sister’s were still rather of the old-fashioned moral novel kind, foolish young men of the dandy type, all lispings or swaggering. “ Remember our Jack is an officer too,” laughed Daisy, recovering.

“ Oh ! Jack—yes, but Jack is different.

He was always himself," replied Polly, uttering the last sentence with an air of deep wisdom; adding, however, most graciously, "But still, from your description, Captain Gascoigne must have a great deal of common sense. And you say, besides, he is not at all good-looking."

"I said that you might not think him at all so, dear; but of course *I* think he is very," interposed Daisy.

"And that he does not care for making himself agreeable in society."

"Now, Polly, he can't help being always agreeable; what I said was, that he is always very quiet."

"So that I really think I shall like him very much indeed," ended Polly, quite unheeding Daisy's mild remonstrances. "And I believe I shall like your friend Miss Goodchild, too. Yes, better than—"

(a slight backward jerk of her head designated Miss Cox)—“We two should not get on so well together.”

“Ah! well; poor Fuzzy!—perhaps not. But, anyhow, *they* two seem to get on remarkably well together,” answered Daisy, with comfortable kindliness. “And I *know* you and Una will be fast friends.”

And now the cob, trotting faster, passed the little hamlet near home, consisting of the post-office, the “Black Bull” public house, and four rural cottages. The lodges came in sight, were swung open; and they dashed through. There in the big lawn, between the house and the road, were all the beloved, well-known milch kine.

“The cattle are grazing,
Their heads never raising;
There are forty feeding like one!”

Down the gravelled drive came all the tribe of Gad whooping welcome. On the

steps stood the squire, beaming like a fine sunset; and Mrs. Dimity stood a little behind, as one glad indeed to see Daisy—but accustomed to put herself ostentatiously in the back-ground of general estimation.

CHAPTER XVI.

“The snowy-banded, dilettante,
Delicate-handed priest.”

IT was the hot resting noontide of the summer now at Elm Hall.

Una Goodchild had come; the second bloom of roses was out. The birds had long ceased singing, except for occasional twitters of blissful content.

But if the first rapture of the earth's re-awakened beauty had settled into riper, fuller calm, nature had still new charms to produce. In the black bean-fields there

was a scattered flush of poppies; the cottage-gardens burnt with the red and yellow flowers of the time of year, scarlet-runners and nasturtiums.

Instead of the white butterflies that a while ago had been gaily courting in couples, beautiful moths fluttered singly by; pursued, alas! with ruthless hands and healthy clamour, by the young Dimity despoilers, four young sons of thunder, with a fifth in petticoats struggling in their rear.

It was a pleasant homestead, Elm Hall: they were a pleasant party therein.

Yet on this afternoon Daisy, standing on the white doorstep, was trying *not* to feel so very happy that soon she must be thinking of leaving it! that this very evening the some one was coming who was to carry her off from her home and household, leaving a gap in the hearth-circle, and

reducing the squire and Polly to certain tears.

Daisy stood enquiring of her lazy mind how she should wisely spend the long three hours that were such a mere preface to the coming evening. In the school-room indoors, Polly and Una, having declared it was too hot to be outside, were absolutely reading German novels—by way of improving their education and minds. Daisy, who shuddered at German, had fled and left them; with a momentary feeling that they were very learned and wise in pursuits, and she a silly housewifely simpleton, only raised to romance by being in love.

Little she knew they were both devouring the ardent love-stories of two just such simple German maidens—that was all the nature of their deep studies, that “and nothing more !”

Where was Mrs. Dimity? She was superintending the two housemaids with an eye of languid doubtfulness, fearing the guests' bed-rooms were not properly arranged, or their sheets not aired; or else she was mildly aggravating the cook by aimless inroads into the kitchen.

Where was the squire? His favourite daughter felt inclined to pass this last afternoon with him, by way of consolation for the loss he would soon feel. But he was having a warm altercation with his steward, in the farmyard premises, on the important subject of grass-seeds.

And where was Fuzzy Cox—ah! where? No one quite knew; she had mysteriously slipped away,

Thus Daisy was still standing on the doorstep; not feeling lonely, nor neglected, nor anything in particular; but rather restlessly happy, swinging her hat.

She looked with a hesitating eye towards the garden, wondering whether she should take her solitariness there to eat fruit. It was a comfortable square garden, behind the house, of the kind we all know. High wall and high fruit-trees, strawberry-beds and gravel-walks all round; then the small fruit-trees, with the vegetables in the middle, discreetly half-hidden by sweet-pea hedges.

It was very nice, but not romantic.

Daisy felt a wish for some more sylvan nook; where, if she could not carve Gascoigne's name upon the trees, she might, at least, whisper in spirit to them of this gentleman of many excellencies.

So down she went towards the wood, their one wood, the only romantic spot they had in the flat, comfortable grounds.

The calm brown river slid by here, under the solemn elms. Daisy loved it

as the only piece of water in the demesne; and though somewhat too sluggish of flow, yet the yellow water-irises stood up bravely with their sword-leaves along its banks, and the water-lily cups rode, thick and white, upon its gentle current. Overhead, up among the high, stiff branches, the rooks were cawing. It was shady, still, and almost a little dull here.

On a sudden, Daisy slightly started, seeing the flutter of a dress up the river-side.

It was Fuzzy Cox, and with her surely not—but, yes! surely indeed, the Reverend Adolphus Younghusband, going demurely by her side.

There was an arbour near; one Daisy did not greatly like, because of a wooden eagle topping its thatched roof, or rather which with decrepitude seemed tipsily tumbling off its pointed perch, a most disconsolate fowl.

Into this arbour, however, Daisy darted, with a sudden impulse to get out of the way. Then she softly peeped out, not quite sure whether it was not a mean thing to do; and yet *really* all she wanted was to watch which way they should take, that she might go in the opposite direction.

They came quite near by the back of the arbour, the most sequestered way. The young celibate was demurely and softly pacing, with Fuzzy's arm drawn through his own.

"You will come with me as far as the opening in the wood, will you not? There can be no harm in our going just so far together," he was pleading. "There is a view there, over a cornfield; I should like you to see it first when we are together. It is of my—of, of *our* future home."

And Fuzzy, even with more intense propriety, replied,

“I am sure it is lovely. What real pleasure it will be always to live in the country! But—but remember, dear Adolphus, you must really not tempt me to walk any further.”

“Oh! her shoes are too tight,” thought Daisy, sagely shaking her head. “I remember wondering this afternoon why she had put on her best town ones.”

After this, little Miss Dimity, knowing that the couple were not likely to return that way, strolled leisurely forth, with much thought over this turn of affairs. She wandered slowly forward, fishing for water-lilies as she went, with her parasol, and bringing many dripping treasures to land. Intent on this, she did not know what a pretty picture she made.

“Hallo!” cried Jemmy, one of her

smallest brothers, giving her sleeve a violent tug, "I say——"

"Jemmy dear, how you made my heart jump! What is the matter?"

"Nothing," replied that unconcerned young man of seven years, "'ceptin' there's a fellow—a gentleman—says he wants to speak to you very particular. He said his name was Jerry Brown."

"*Jerry Brown!* Oh, my goodness!! Where is he?"

"He's in the harbour, waiting.—My! was that a fish?"

"What was he like, Jemmy dear; what was he like?" (in tones of agony).

"He's an awful —— I do believe it's a water-rat."

"An awful *what*—?" inquired Daisy, visibly trembling; her face quite pale, with fear of the coming unknown lover; her heart, at Jemmy's light utterance of the

word awful, going fairly down to her heels. Jemmy answered, in a great hurry, to be at more important matters,

“Don’t I tell you, he’s a howling what-you-may-call-it!—Oh, my eye! It is a water-rat; let me get a stone to kill it.”

Daisy seized her young brother by the shoulders, almost inclined to shake him.

“A howling *what?*—an awful *what?*—Never mind the rat; you must tell me.”

“Let me go,” struggling and kicking, in fear that the rat would escape him. “What plagues girls are! Didn’t I tell you?” in a sort of weeping shout. “He looks a tremenjous swell.”

With a sort of sigh of partly deliverance, partly increased awe, Daisy removed her hands. Away tore Jemmy down stream, like a loosed arrow. Slowly and sadly our poor damsel approached that terrible den

of an arbour; with quaking heart and quivering limbs, her hands unconsciously still full of "water-lilies, broad and bright."

She neared it; she was in the doorway, and, without daring to raise her head, was aware of a presence.

"You are—you are——" she murmured.

"I am Mr. Jerry Brown," said a strong, well-known voice overhead, with suppressed laughter. She looked up; she raised her head.

"Oh, is it you?" she uttered, with a glad, small cry of utter delight, as she found herself drawn into the arbour gently by Gascoigne. "But how could you tell such a fib?" she asked, with loving reproach that accepts any excuse fondly, when they were sufficiently sane to return to this history.

"What fib?—I told no fib."

“*Oh!* . . You told Jemmy to say you were Jerry Brown.”

“Look me in the face,” was all Gascoigne’s oracular reply. And as Miss Daisy, not very loth, wonderingly did his bidding, and gazed up in his face and gazed—suddenly a light seemed to dawn upon her from his good, gray eyes.

“Is it possible? You cannot be——!” she just ejaculated.

“Yes; I am Gerald or Jerry Brownrigg Gascoigne. Now, look at me well again. Do you remember, I had reddish hair to my sorrow, as a boy; but, after being shaven in a fever, it grew more brown. And then, in the Barley Vicarage days, of course I was what poets call a beardless boy, and hardly full-grown. Ah! I am afraid you don’t remember much about poor Jerry Brown, after all; and that you were as fickle in heart as the rest of your sex.”

“No, no; indeed! And I remembered far more about you than you did about me.” (She had the best of it there.) “After all, it was very long ago; and you are very changed; and then the name led me astray.”

“It was long ago,” assented Gascoigne; “but you are not so very changed, I believe; though I must own the recollection of the little Daisy I used to meet when fishing by the river was almost asleep in my memory, till first your name stirred it, and little by little it awoke. Only I could not have remembered the name of Dimity, till you unconsciously brought all our former wooing back to me. Perhaps such a pretty name as Daisy was enough for me then.”

“But I used to be quite grieved yours was so ugly. Why did you tell me it was *Brown*?”

“Because,” laughed Gascoigne, “the second time we ever met each other, when no one had introduced us by the river-side, though you spent the whole afternoon with me, Miss!—well, that day I happened to be playing truant from my tutor. And not wishing anyone to find out afterwards that I had been fishing, in an idle mood, when you asked my name, I told you part of it. Afterwards, being rather in love with you, it pleased me you should have a different name for me from the rest of the world.”

“No. Were you really—?” in secret intense delight. “Ah! you are only saying that, now, to please me.”

“No, indeed. I have never forgotten that time of our golden age. There was always a dim, pleasant memory of you in my mind as my little first love.”

And then with mutual “Do you remem-

bers?" and glad assents and delighted re-travelling of the old road of wooing, these two unveiled the recollections of bygone days—till on a sudden Gascoigne remembered the present.

"What will all the rest think of us?" he asked, laughing. "You don't even know yet that your brother and Mr. Lee are in the house. I found there was an earlier train we could catch by driving across country, and persuaded them to come. What will they say?"

And as these two slowly returned and came in sight of the house, the tall figure of Gascoigne beside Daisy's little trim one, both apparently suiting each other with a wonderful fitness—Jack's voice called in kindly gibing from the lawn, where all the rest were gathered together for tennis and tea, "Well, you are a pretty couple!"

"We have brought you the latest news

from Marstown," cried the Smiler gaily, after he had rushed to congratulate Daisy, and smiling like the sun had twisted his moustaches more than ever, murmuring aside: How that he had guessed it all along, what an Irresistible One she was, to be sure! while dear old Gascoigne was the greatest friend he had in the world—"We have brought you news (where's Miss Cox?) of another wedding *on the tapis*. Excuse a bad joke, won't you?—ho, ho!"

"Yes," graciously allowed Jack.

"Miss Pussy is going to marry the old carpet-maker; and Miss Birdie is ready to scratch her eyes out."

L'ENVOI.

“For now is Palamon in alle well,
 Lyvyng in blisse, in richesse, and in hele;
 And Emelye him loveth so tendrely,
 And he her serveth al so gentilly,
 That nevere was ther no word hem bitweene
 Of jealousye, or any other teene.
 Thus endeth Palamon and Emelye,
 And God save al this fayre compainye.”

THEY had been a very merry party at
 Elm Hall during three or four days.
 But the last evening had come of Jack's
 stay.

The day after his arrival home he had
 had an offer of going out as aide-de-camp

to a general who had just been desired by Mother England to give some savage tribes a thrashing in one of her most distant colonies. The matter was not really England's business; but, since Great Britons have received the divine mission to act as moral policemen of the earth, the general's orders were, that these tribes were first to be beaten and then be forgiven.

A new life had been infused into young Jack. He had not been heard to grumble more than twice a day, and was in the cheerfullest good-humour; though Daisy had frequently been caught in a shower of tears; and even Polly, who used to plume herself on her Spartan feelings ere this, looked more alarmed than proud at her brother's distinction.

But Jack was so delighted, they had to cheer up. And Gascoigne's presence,

as may be imagined, vastly comforted Daisy.

The Smiler likewise was full of joyous predictions.

“Lucky dog; he won’t get a scratch, you’ll see, and will come back with his medals, and you’ll all think him no end of a hero. I only wish it was me.”

“I wish it was,” said young Polly, half tearfully, but maliciously.

And now the young people were all sitting out on the lawn after dinner. The squire was, as usual, nodding indoors; and Mrs. Dimity was busy at some work, as was also usual, by her lamp in the drawing-room. At present she was industriously knitting in haste woollen socks “for dear Jack to take away with him,” which, as he was going to a very warm climate, proved more affection than discretion, like most of Mrs. Dimity’s occupations.

But, out of doors, the young folk were all delightfully idle, enjoying the cool evening air, the gloaming, and each other's society. They were seated rather in twos and twos—"Like St. Valentine's Day, ain't it?" as the Smiler gaily remarked. But then he meant the engaged couples.

Quite furthest away of all sat Fuzzy Cox and her curate on a garden-bench, with the greatest air of meek demureness in the world. The rest were comfortably at ease on rugs and wicker chairs on the smooth-shaven grass, and had their jokes in common; but this behaviour of ordinarily vulgar mortals was unsuited to the still æstheticism of the thoughtful pair sitting on the bench.

Gascoigne was absolutely smoking (what a contrast!), strolling up and down with Daisy.

They came often just near enough the

rest not to seem selfish, and to have a joke and a loving sisterly word for poor Jack; just far enough at times not to bore others with talk that was then indeed entirely absorbed with each other.

“What a delightfully well-suited couple those two do make!” rather dreamily observed Una Goodchild. “One can quite well fancy it will be true of them, after their marriage, that, as the story-books say, ‘they lived happy ever after.’”

“Yes,” said Jack, approvingly, who was beside her and Polly. “I’m very glad I shall just manage to be at the wedding before my start. By the time I come back again, Miss Goodchild, I suppose both you and Polly here will be spliced likewise.”

Una Goodchild slightly laughed, but looked down.

“ Oh ! no ; I don't think so,” she softly said. “ When a woman once marries she can't draw back, and try whether she would not be happier in devoting herself to what are more the works of single women. *I* think either of going to Girton College, or of being trained as a sick-nurse, for a year or two ; or at least—if my parents want me to stay at home—giving my life up to art. No : I shall have too much to do to think of getting married to anyone before you come home, Mr. Dimity.”

“ Well, whatever you do, don't go into a sisterhood or a nunnery,” said Jack, lightly.

The mutual tendency to liking of these two had become a feeling of excellent friendliness. On Jack's part it might have been more, but that with their meeting at Elm Hall had come his call for active

service, which, man-like, quite filled his mind. And so he

“Look’d upon her with a soldier’s eye,
That lik’d, but had a rougher task in hand
Than to drive liking to the name of love.”

And for Una, it had never dawned upon her that at Marstown she might have had, if she had liked it, a flirtation with her friend’s brother. Her mind had been too full of efforts at leading “a higher life,” as she vaguely phrased it. Her conversations with Jack—had the world only heard them—were the most single-minded, earnest endeavours to infuse enthusiasm into that martial Gallo for the God-like heroes or aims which in that hour were enshrined in the chiefest place of her young mind’s sanctuary. Or if these were too sacred, or Jack too carelessly good-humoured, she used to bring out whichever of her hobbies

whose turn it was to be exercised, and Jack was sure to admire them.

And so she had not fancied herself in love with Jack Dimity because—fancy had been busy with other matters.

Meanwhile the poor Smiler was faring worst of all these valentines, as he called them, because Polly snubbed him atrociously. Such an utter school-room minx as she was! yet she laughed at his real “big diamonds” in compliments.

“What a humbug you are, Mr. Lee. I really believe you are the most Incarnate Humbug on earth. It is a wonder Daisy never found you out.”

“No; really! Upon my honour I am not—people sometimes say so, but it is only the unkindness of the world and scandal against me. I have felt it often very deeply, and I only hope you may not some day,” sighed Lee, smiling no more, but

looking as sad as the sun in a fog ; wagging his head with an air of injury that would really have melted any female young person's heart who did not know that in ten minutes he would have forgotten or forgiven all his imaginary enemies.

“What! Is Polly at it again?” called out Jack this evening. “I tell you what, if you are so pert, young woman, you'll never get a husband, if ever you do come to a ball of ours.”

“Don't distress yourself,” said Polly, saucily. “Daisy has told me of two Quiet Gentlemen—one of whom might take a fancy to me, who knows? just by way of contrast.”

“Oh! you are a Clever One—what a Clever One you are!” murmured the Smiler, who had now recovered himself, gazing at her bright young face with

almost his best air of admiration; although, in general, very young girls were not so much to his taste as those who knew that his flirtation was meant to sparkle, not to burn, and, by a little experience, were too wise to fall really in love—which would have distressed him very much. But Polly was a sensible girl, he thought to himself with satisfaction, and could take care of her heart.

Of course there was also Una Goodchild to consider (since he was not himself without some one of the fair sex to chaff and adore), but, though a flirt, he was a friend. Was he likely to go and “cut out” his less attractive comrade; to interfere in the last sweet home amusement of the poor soldier, soon under orders for barbarous climes.

Oh, no; never!—not if it even cost

him far more. So, with an inward feeling of his own nobility, this self-sacrificing youth courted Polly.

And now, as they all sat or lay on the grass and talked of wedding presents, rice showers, and old slippers, the young brothers of the house of Dimity suddenly burst across the lawn with clamour; jumped the ha-ha with shouts—all but the youngest, who stood hesitating on its brink, and yelled—and attacking an apparently peaceful individual toiling towards them along a path that crossed the lawn, despoiled him of a bag he carried, then returned with an air of savage joy. The peaceful family party, who witnessed this deed of robbery, only remarked, with a calm air,

“It’s the postman.”

Everyone now began to share the news. But, ere Fuzzy Cox and her gentle, af-

fianced partner had approached with measured step, Jack eagerly announced, so loud that the accents must have disturbed the air within a yard of the unsuspecting couple,

“I say, what do you all think—the old colonel will certainly come himself to the wedding, Daisy; and he bids me tell Miss Fuzzy Cox, as to her *fiancé*, that ‘an ounce of mother wit is worth a pound of clergy!’”

When the applause which this excellent proverb elicited had died away, Daisy observed, in her turn,

“And I have heard from the dear old Miss Silverthornes. They are coming to stay for my wedding, also; and are bringing a present of two nodding China mandarins, and an Old Derby tea-set, even more ancient and much more valuable than themselves, they say.

And they promise not to cry at any changes they may see in Elm Hall."

"Thank goodness!" piously ejaculated Gascoigne, in his dreamily pleasant drawl.

"Oh! here's a letter from mamma, and she's very glad to accept dear Adolphus's invitation to receive her for the wedding, too," called out Fuzzy, with more animation than was usual of late with her, reading over her curate's shoulder. "Birdie isn't well pleased that you've not asked her to be a bridesmaid as well as me, dear Daisy. Well, is she not going to be mine and Pussy's a fortnight later—what more does she want? . . . And, oh! mamma is so delighted with the Indian shawl you and Captain Gascoigne sent her—she says it is even handsomer than the old one."

At this moment attention was again

drawn to the young Dimity tribe, who emerged from the house once more, making martial music with their mouths; all their red young cheeks distended like those of trumpeters. They came in a sort of procession.

First came Billy, with his brother Jack's new helmet of war and sword, trailing and bumping on the ground. Next, Bobby, wearing the luckless Smiler's most beautiful Sunday hat, that came down low on his chubby nose; whilst to emulate an acrobat, he continually ducked his pate, trying to kick the shining head-gear with his toe.

Jemmy—and he was Daisy's especial darling—followed, wearing Gascoigne's best dust-coat, which being much too long for him spread behind in a fine train. On this train Charlie and the big, petticoated Baby made frantic rushes, stamp-

ing upon it with jeers, whereunto Jemmy retaliated—like the wild Irishman he simulated—with invitations to battle.

There was an instant rush made upon these young rascals by Jack, Daisy, and Polly (to the infinite relief, it need hardly be remarked, of Gascoigne and Lee). The two first brigands were captured and relieved of their stolen goods in a few moments. But as Daisy herself pursued that arch-sinner Jemmy, whilst he escaped with loud outcries, the dear dust-coat was caught by its pocket on the door-scraper. There was the shriek of rent lining! But even as Daisy, who had caught the culprit, gazed aghast—a beautiful brilliant brooch, containing in the middle a diamond of great size and purest lustre, rolled at her feet.

“My lost Marguerite brooch, I declare!” exclaimed Gascoigne, with joy,

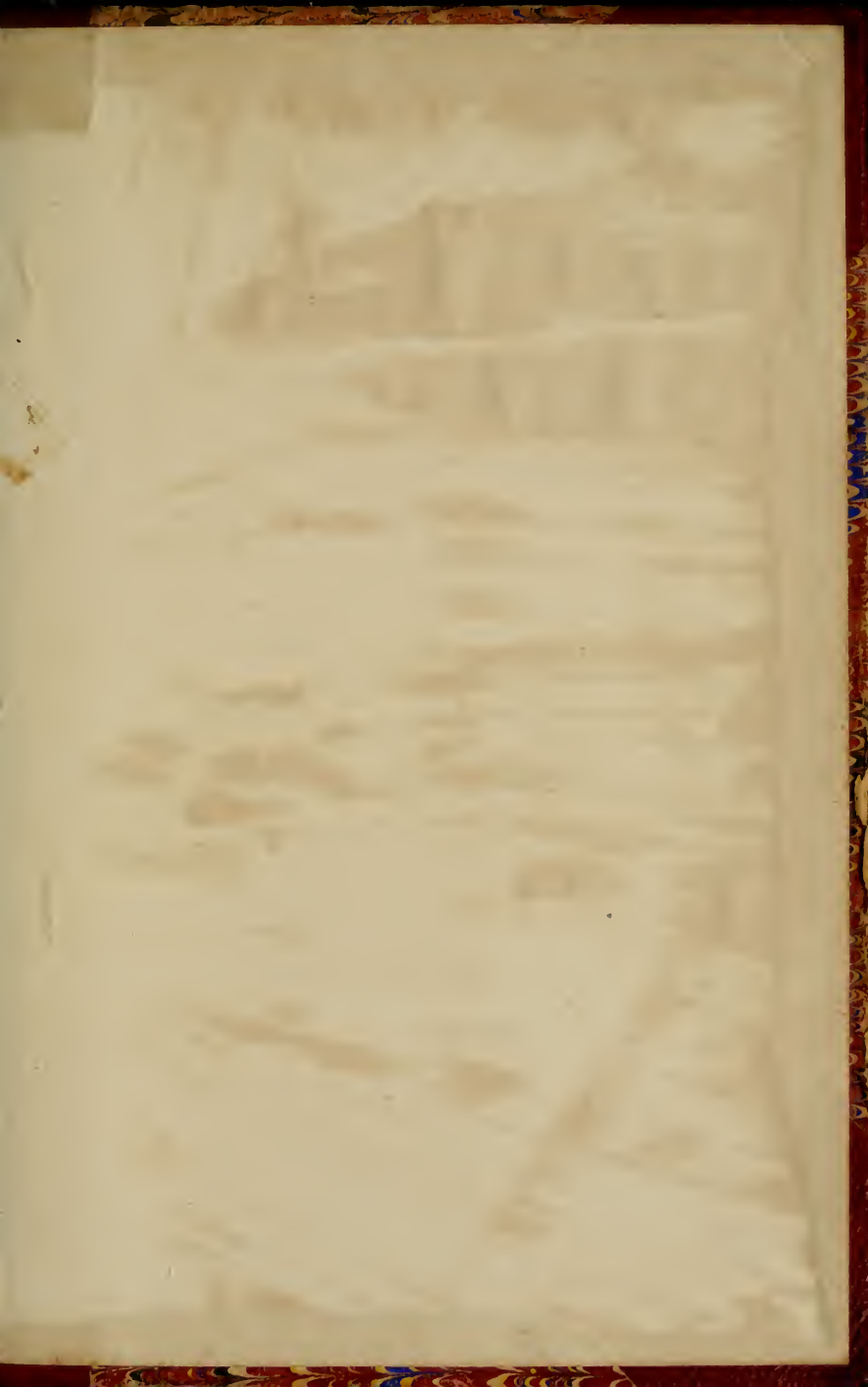
coming up. "This is the identical rare daisy namesake of yours I lost on the evening of our ball, Daisy. It was the present I meant for you; an old family heir-loom."

And so, in the midst of the general joy and congratulation on the recovery of this lost treasure, the tribe of Gad not only escaped punishment, but even had the insolence to awaken the echoes of Elm Hall with clamorous claims for a holiday on the morrow, in recompense for their share in the discovery.

THE END.

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